

Governance, social relations and popular politics in eighteenth century Norwich

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Daniel Howse
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INTRODUCTION

1. Approach

The main concern of this study is with the role of governance in the political life of Norwich over the first seventy years of the eighteenth-century. By the city's 'political life' I mean a broader, unattenuated, field of political activity, not limited to electoral behaviour or party organisation and ideology, but touching on different aspects of how its inhabitants were governed, and how they expected to be governed.

This perspective treats the polity as the locus of political life, rather than Westminster or the Court, and is primarily concerned with power and social relations as they were played out within the locality. Adrian Leftwich emphasised that politics is most productively considered not as a form of public activity easily separable from private life, but as integral to the multiple forms of co-operation and conflict which determine "the use, production, and distribution of human, natural and other resources".¹ This definition incorporates a range of actions and forms of participation, some of which might not typically be labelled as political in the course of our everyday lives, but are more easily recognised as such when carried out within the scope of formal public authority vested in the state or the government of the city.²

The most formal elements of these forms of activity are evident in the frequent electoral contests of early eighteenth-century Norwich, but many historians of the period have also helped draw attention to the vitality and significance of popular politics. Following the

¹ Adrian Leftwich, 'Politics: People, Resources and Power', in Leftwich (ed.), What is Politics? (Oxford, 1984), p.64

² Ibid., p.70

foundational work of George Rudé and E.P. Thompson considerable emphasis has been placed on riot and protest as representing not spasmodic disorder, but deliberate and structured actions which sought legitimation by claiming to represent the good of the community, and if not

‘political’ in any advanced sense, nevertheless it cannot be described as unpolitical either, since it supposed definite, and passionately held, notions of the common weal.³

As important and revealing as popular disturbances about food pricing or impressment can be, Nicholas Rogers has justly cautioned that by concentrating on conflictual scenarios the contextual interplay of relations between governors and governed can be submerged, and “broader discussion of the patterns of non-violent as well as violent forms of popular negotiation”⁴ discouraged. Through the episodes that make up the following study I attempt to retrieve a nuanced sense of the quotidian relationships and exchanges which constituted the city’s political culture in this period, in particular focusing on the actions which shaped how ideas and expectations about governance were enacted and received.

The effects of wide-ranging changes in this period, as for the preceding centuries, were profound and deeply felt, and the sense that they destabilised social relations settled in the locality was widespread. These concerns were not especially novel; John Norden’s *Surveior’s Dialogue*, written in the early seventeenth-century, had cautioned against the effect of the encroaching national markets in spreading bad habits, to the decay of the proper

³ E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, in *Customs in Common* (London, 1991), p.188

⁴ Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture, and Politics* (Oxford, 1998), p.12

husbandry of the land.⁵ However the quickening of this process from the 1690s sharpened these fears, particularly as many of the changes introduced seemed a decisive rupture with the established order of things. The creation of permanent government debts, with its long-term creditors' securities changing hands as tradeable commodities, drew the nation into what has been described as a financial revolution, as the "liquidity of National Debt attracted investors who, in the past, might have placed their fund in land."⁶

The political, legal, economic and communicative changes, clustered around the ongoing process of state formation, created extra-territorial networks which connected intra-regional development, and on which the national state and market was built. Regional economic specialisation was stimulated by integration into the national economy, importing what they did not produce locally and exporting their own produce elsewhere, and dependent on middlemen to manage the burgeoning volume of trade this process of commercial exchange created. Such circumstances, exacerbated by a shortage of currency specie, necessitated a more effective system for the circulation of credit, to maintain the regularity of production and trade, and generating a stock for investment in these ventures. A concern for the efficient circulation of credit can be seen in contemporary proposals for the establishment of provincial banks. Daniel Defoe, writing in 1697, just a year after recoinage and the issue of exchequer paper notes, described a hypothetical project by which the gentlemen and tradesmen of Norfolk might establish a bank in Norwich. By paying their cash into the city's chamber it could be managed in the corporation's name, providing a resource for the city's manufacturers and merchants. Such corporation banks, he argued, could be established in the

⁵ John Norden, The Surveiors Dialogue (London, 1610), p.254

⁶ P.G.M. Dickson, The Financial Revolution in England (London, 1967); Ranald Michie, The London Stock Exchange (Oxford, 1999), p.25

principal trading towns for the country, and by correspondence with one another "might with ease so pass each other's bills that a man who has cash at Plymouth and wants money at Berwick, may transfer his cash".⁷

Fernand Braudel, charting these developments, pointed to the geographic spread of banking credit in this period as signalling the formation of an integrated national economy in England. Other indications of the tendency towards the creation of a unitary national system could be discerned in the dissemination of women's style of dress and in the development of what historians have designated under the umbrella term 'polite culture'.⁸ Production and consumption, affiliation and forms of self-fashioning shifted ever more from localised platforms to broader inter-regional and national networks. However these systems also destabilised many of the existing models for interpersonal social relations, which still tended to function within the framework of a more defined and limited locality, and caused anxieties to emerge in regard to determining trust, credibility and reputation.

The development of the market for commercial news drove the thriving print culture which emerged with improved national communications and the lapsing of the Licensing Act in 1695. However the proliferation of print was accompanied by doubts about its reliability. Manuscript circulation, official proclamations or the bellman's call were all forms of publication which were semi-socialised, but print, because of the level of access, and the size and geographic dispersal of its potential audience, entailed different dynamics of trust and credit. Conventional reassurances about authorial honesty, based on personal reputation or proximal acquaintance, were complicated by news being relayed through one

⁷ Daniel Defoe, 'Of Banks', in Cottrell and Anderson (ed.), Money and Banking in England (Newton Abbot, 1974), pp.84-5

⁸ Fernand Braudel, The Perspective of the World (London, 2002), p.367

source to another, by largely anonymous men who could not always be vouched for. The Tory proprietor of the *Norwich Gazette* warned against stockjobbers “continually hatching and spreading false Accounts of the State of Affairs Abroad, in order to intimidate the People, and run down the Stocks”, and reported that on orders from Viscount Townshend a man had been placed under arrest “for attempting to publish a Paragraph of false News”.⁹ The press not only reported on national affairs, but was itself an agent for change, drawing localities into the nation.

In the closing months of 1730 the press brought news of a national epidemic of cases of arson, with anonymous threatening letters detailing grievances or attempting to extort money reported from Exeter, Wisbech, Chatham, Gloucester, London, Bath, Bristol, Macclesfield, Basingstoke and other locations. The *Norwich Gazette* reported that a letter complaining about the “Conduct and Management” of the Norwich workhouse had been delivered to the home of one of the city’s magistrates, threatening to burn down his house, unless the complaints were addressed.¹⁰ By the following week further letters had been received, with one to a city alderman “containing not only audacious and felonious Threatnings, but very Treasonable and Seditious Expressions”, leading the Court of Mayoralty to order the ward constables place a watch on the city, to guard against incendiaries.¹¹ The next week saw further letters delivered, with one to a city brewer demanding ten guineas not to burn his premises down.¹² The spate of threatening letters seems to have been driven by the publicity the press afforded, with the reports prompting others to imitate their example, and their incidence across the country suggesting that publication deterritorialised such forms of emulation. Given the varying

⁹ *NG*, 2nd Oct 1725; *NG*, 21st May 1726; *NG*, 4th June 1726

¹⁰ *NG*, 21st Nov. 1730

¹¹ *NG*, 28th Nov. 1730

¹² *NG*, 5th Dec. 1730

messages and motives which were contained in the letters it also indicates that they offered for some a means for expressing dissatisfaction and applying pressure on local governors.

Amidst the heightened anxieties about strangers an arrest was made in Norwich of "a Gentleman-like Man".¹³ If it is a curious phrase, it does seem to capture some of the concerns of the period. In a hierarchical society, which inherited from the early modern period a sense of 'optic order', appearance and comportment functioned as markers of one's status, and contributed to how a subject's trustworthiness and credit was perceived.¹⁴ The suspect appeared to be a gentleman, but was merely passing himself off as one, in the same way he had previously "pretended to have been a Messenger... and has commanded Post-Horses upon the Road as such."¹⁵ Such uncertainties were not novel, but increased geographic and social mobility, and the deterritorialisation of reputation and credibility, placed pressure on the ways in which people perceived and constructed identities, and consequently confused and unsettled the social order.

At the beginning of the eighteenth-century Norwich was in likelihood the largest provincial city in England, although it still paled in comparison to the size and importance of metropolitan London. Its importance as a county town to the populous county of Norfolk was of secondary importance at this point in time to its economic status as an important centre of textile production.¹⁶ Its population growth in the latter part of the seventeenth-century was accounted for largely by immigration to the city, attracted by the prosperity of the city's textile manufactory, and had brought the number of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Paul Griffiths, 'Bodies and Souls in Norwich: Punishing Petty Crime, 1540-1700', in Devereaux and Griffiths (ed.), Penal Practice and Culture (Basingstoke, 2004), pp.92-3

¹⁵ NG, 12th Dec. 1730

¹⁶ Penelope J. Corfield, 'From Second City to Regional Capital', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, Norwich since 1550 (London, 2004)

inhabitants to about 30,000.¹⁷ Indeed, the dominance of the Norwich textile trades entailed such a degree of economic specialisation that the city's stability and wellbeing was dependent on the continued demand for its manufactures, with downturns disrupting the economy of the whole city.¹⁸ The surrounding region operated in its economic gravity, spinning yarn and weaving, as well as providing auxiliary services and products, so that when Defoe passed through the southern part of Norfolk in the 1720s he was able to describe it as the most populous and industrialised section of the country outside of London.¹⁹

By this time the city had become a busy commercial centre for producing and selling textiles; but in addition to the merchants and artisans, great and small, its importance and wealth also supported a range of professionals, mercers, innkeepers, grocers and shopkeepers, clustered in the parishes around the city's marketplace, who supplied services, provisions and consumer goods to the city. It was this growing middle rank of society, as much as the merchant-manufacturing elite or the county gentry, which drove the urban development of Norwich.²⁰ Their wealth made them consumers as well as suppliers, and as they became more numerous amongst the city's ratepayers, their economic contribution grew more significant and made them confident of their roles, though ordinarily eclipsed by the interests of the greater merchants.

However, as the pace of industrialisation, and the demographic shifts it presaged, increased, Norwich lost its place amongst the first rank of provincial cities: outgrown first by Bristol, and then in the

¹⁷ P.J. Corfield, 'A provincial capital in the late seventeenth century', in Clark and Slack (ed.), Crisis and Order in English towns (London, 1972), pp.266-8

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.295-6

¹⁹ Daniel Defoe, A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain (London, 1711), pp.84-6

²⁰ Peter Borsay, The English Urban Renaissance (Oxford, 1989), pp.203-4

course of the latter half of the century by the rapidly growing industrial and commercial centres of the north and midlands.²¹ Throughout the century the city competed for its share of the commercial markets, and saw its manufacturers change tack on several occasions to maintain their precedence. However, advances to methods of production and changing consumption ultimately saw Norwich's textile trades lose ground, and in the latter part of the century much of the surrounding region actually began to experience a process of de-industrialisation, in contrast to the national picture.

Although it could be tempting to represent the city as in decline, displaced by the inexorable march of economic progress, it has been shown that this was not the case. Whilst the textile trade experienced pronounced fluctuations in the course of the period I am examining, it attained its apogee around mid-century, and did not wane until much later.²² The growth of national markets and changing lines of supply meant that the city's industry was in this period becoming less dependent on the surrounding region, and could bring in yarn for its manufactures from Ireland and elsewhere. So, although the county was de-industrialising, this was not the case for the city itself, and in fact the corresponding movement of surplus population from these outlying towns and villages provided an important source of mobile labour for the city's factors, and which, in turn, contributed to anxieties about vagrancy and mobility.²³

Norwich, given its prodigious development in the seventeenth-century, provides an exemplary case of already mature urban and civic structures, which can be observed responding to a period of

²¹ Jan de Vries, European Urbanization (London, 1984), pp.270-1

²² P.J. Corfield, The social and economic history of Norwich (University of London, 1976)

²³ See ch.5

economic, social and political upheaval, and thus reveals a wealth of information about how these affairs and relationships were negotiated and accommodated. The attempts of Norwich's magistracy to impose and maintain order in the face of such challenges were complicated by the practical necessity of incorporating and adapting to change.

While agricultural improvements increased yields, the creation of national markets for grain and victuals changed the pattern of marketing and supply. Coupled to the mercantilist policies of the eighteenth-century state, which offered bounties for overseas exportation, there were periodic shortages, driving up prices and placing pressure on local authorities to rectify the situation.²⁴ National markets were, however, generally less responsive to purely local initiatives, and concerns about provisioning in 1740, 1756 and 1766 were met with governmental proclamations against forestalling and engrossing, reiterating the two hundred year old Tudor statutes, committing local magistrates to enforcing just marketing practices.²⁵

The traditionalism and resistance to change shared by many early modern men and women persisted well into the eighteenth-century, and established customs and usages continued to regulate many peoples' working lives, as well as structure ideas about their social relations. This kind of traditionalism provided not just familiarity, but real security, both legal and economic. It safeguarded certain privileges, and placed obligations and responsibilities on the city's civic elite to assume a certain style of paternalist governance. In Norwich the independence and attendant privileges of many journeymen artisans in the textile industry were secured as customary rights, and could not be easily changed without

²⁴ Norris A. Brisco, 'The Economic Policy of Robert Walpole', Studies in History Economics and Public Law 27 (1907), pp.129-31

²⁵ Joanna Innes, Inferior Politics (Oxford, 2009), p.55; See *infra* ch.6

compromising the legalism and reputation of the governors, whose responsibility it was to oversee such matters. However, in adapting to the changing nature of the eighteenth-century textile markets' changes to such settled social and economic conventions needed to be accommodated and negotiated.²⁶ In these circumstances statutory powers offered little more than a blunt instrument, and whatever legitimacy they offered the city's magistrates still required it to be presented in a manner mutually recognised, and acknowledged, as legitimate.²⁷

Politics in these contexts is best understood in terms of the administration and maintenance of social order, rather than party disputes and elections. This is not to say that the latter are unimportant; in fact, quite the contrary is true, but as I hope to show, a more detailed understanding of the underlying social relations between governors and governed will enrich our interpretation of these political exchanges. Viewed in this way, politics is more concerned with the role of citizen electors or office holders, and the ways in which the formally unenfranchised all influenced, and needed to be negotiated, in the exercise of governance and rule.

2. Authority and locality in early modern England

In examining how these exchanges took place I am extending observations about the localised authority of the early modern state and its processes of governance into the eighteenth-century. Historians of early modern England have found that the practice of governing and policing the nation in practice fell ordinarily to local office holders who might struggle to implement the mandates of

²⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978), p.71

²⁷ See ch.5

Crown or parliament, and whose own priorities might actually be rather different from those of the executive governors of the nation state.

Order, as it was conceived of at this most intimate local level, was less a positive aspiration towards a national condition of disciplined social harmony than a negative absence of disruptive conflict locally... 'Order' meant little more than conformity to a fairly malleable local custom which was considerably more flexible than statute law.²⁸

The execution of the statutes and policies of the early modern state was dependent on the rank-and-file of parochial constables, churchwardens and overseers of the poor policing their "neighbours and kindred, friends and enemies."²⁹ The enforcement and prosecution of the law could come into conflict with a commitment to customary arbitration and 'neighbourliness' within communities, so office holders often employed their discretion in best serving the preservation of local order.³⁰ Cynthia Herrup's study of legal proceedings in seventeenth-century Sussex demonstrated that the execution of justice was dependent on negotiating consensus amongst a range of people concerned in the process. A successful prosecution demanded that "victim and neighbours, headboros and hundredal constables, grand jurors and petty jurors, and magistrates and judges reach generally complementary conclusions about both culpability and criminality."³¹ The increased litigation of the 1590s was the product, not just of demographic and economic

²⁸ Keith Wrightson, 'Two concepts of order' in Brewer and Styles, An Ungovernable People (London, 1980), p.24. See also Steve Hindle, The State and Social Change (Basingstoke, 2002), p.173

²⁹ Patrick Collinson, 'De Republica Anglorum', in Elizabethan Essays (London, 1994), p.26

³⁰ Anthony Fletcher, Reform in the Provinces (New Haven, 1986), pp.82-3

³¹ Cynthia B. Herrup, The Common Peace (Cambridge, 1987), p.195

pressures which accompanied the processes of state formation, but of an increased willingness to appeal to the law, marking the penetration of the state into the provincial localities.³²

The ambitions of the early modern state placed greater statutory responsibilities on the Justices of the Peace, as well as the parochial offices. The stability of this arrangement of state was reliant less "on the extension of a centralised bureaucracy... than upon the continued cooperation of local notables for the administration of the county."³³ Such offices were ordinarily invested in the leading gentry or in the cities its principal inhabitants, whose public standing, in no small measure, underwrote their effectiveness in the role.³⁴ The greater demands made on early modern governance were communicated, via the assize judges, to the Justices of the Peace in the localities, who acted as a hub between the agencies of the government and the subordinate officers who carried out the practical administration and enforcement of social order in their respective neighbourhoods.³⁵

In the English counties, if the commissions of the peace functioned as outposts of the expanding state, the same was no less true of the parish, which assumed a pivotal role in the day-to-day administration of order, "becoming to an unprecedented extent a local expression of state power."³⁶ As, over time, the roles and duties expected of the petty officers became regularised and routinised, the administration of the locality had after 1660 become

³² Michael J. Braddick, State Formation in Early Modern England (Cambridge, 2000), p.162; Hindle, The State and Social Change, p.232

³³ Graeme Gill, The Nature and Development of the Modern State (Basingstoke, 2003), pp.113-4

³⁴ Gerald E. Aylmer, 'Centre and Locality', in Wolfgang Reinhard (ed.), Power Elites and State Building (Oxford, 1996), p.66; Mark Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic' in Tim Harris (ed.), The Politics of the Excluded (Basingstoke, 2001), p.159

³⁵ Keith Wrightson, English Society (London, 1982), pp.152-3; Herrup, The Common Peace, pp.51-2; Fletcher, Reform in the Provinces, pp.47-52

³⁶ Hindle, The State and Social Change, p.215

less dependent on external prompting and intervention.³⁷ It has been argued then, that early modern England, whilst unquestionably subject to the monarch's rule, was also, by virtue of the largely self-governing nature of these localities, "paradoxically cross-grained" and "citizens were concealed in subjects".³⁸

Because of the range of offices, great and petty, involved in the agency of the state, officeholders inhabited a diverse range of social positions. Although the 'middling sorts' which dominated the government of parish vestries in the main differed markedly from the gentlemen of the county community, there was a self-awareness about their distinctive status and role as a local elite, which contributed to a greater degree of social differentiation and polarisation within their communities.³⁹ Whilst office holding had always been, to some degree, sensitive to social status, by the end of the seventeenth-century the imposition of property qualifications proscribed certain offices for anyone who did not possess a certain measure of material wealth, rendering them more socially exclusive.

Whilst early modern historians' emphasis on local studies has reaped clear benefits for the analysis and interpretation of the social and political life of seventeenth-century England, its applicability to the eighteenth-century state has not always been so evident. The society described by Keith Wrightson was characteristically rural, possessed no standing army, and was significantly less integrated into the gravity of both the national state and markets.⁴⁰ The local society of 1700 was in many important respects quite distinct from that described for the 1580s and 1590s.

³⁷ Braddick, State Formation, p.166; Joan Kent, 'The Centre and the Localities: State Formation and Parish Government', Historical Journal 38:2 (Jun. 1995), p.390

³⁸ Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic', p.175; Collinson, 'De Republica Anglorum', p.19

³⁹ Goldie, 'The Unacknowledged Republic', p.163-4; Hindle, The State and Social Change, p.228; Wrightson, English Society, p.223; Fletcher, Reform in the Provinces, pp.63-4

⁴⁰ Wrightson, English Society, pp.150-3

Yet the expansion of the 'fiscal-military state,' set in motion in the 1690s by the necessity of financing English involvement in the Nine Years War, coincided with a contraction in the direct involvement and monitoring of domestic policy by the executive offices of state.⁴¹ The active expansion of the state's military capacities was dependent on more extensive and centrally co-ordinated excise collection, but domestically government tended to assume a more reactive position, in contrast to earlier interventions in municipal government by the Stuart monarchs. This point should not however be overstated, as Brewer noted that contemporary political anxieties reflected an awareness of the state's growing presence and power, even as they helped to hold it in check and forced its actions to be qualified.⁴²

Any withdrawal by the central offices of state needs to be offset against the growing importance of parliament to government after 1688, and which came to provide the main means available for addressing domestic issues.⁴³ In the eighteenth-century more frequent sessions of parliament meant that the role of the legislative grew. The greater part of the volume of legislation they dealt with, particularly in the latter half of the century, were private acts for urban improvements or the construction of turnpike roads. With much of parliament's business concerned with the infrastructure of towns and their intercommunication, it created a common political culture which was "insensibly becoming 'urbanized'".⁴⁴

From the later seventeenth-century the powers previously concentrated in the Privy Council devolved to a number of separate

⁴¹ John Brewer, The Sinews of Power (London, 1989); Lee Davison et al, 'The Reactive State: English Governance and Society' in Davison et al (ed.), Stilling the Grumbling Hive (New York, 1992)

⁴² Brewer, The Sinews of Power, pp.xvii-xix

⁴³ Ibid., p.159; Innes, Inferior Politics, pp.58-9

⁴⁴ P.J. Corfield, The Impact of English Towns (Oxford, 1982), p.158

institutions, including the Treasury and the Secretaries of State, who became the most frequent addressees of eighteenth-century magistrates' reports of sedition and riot.⁴⁵ Communication between the central executive offices of the state and the provincial magistrates of Norwich was made principally by correspondence: requesting details for grain prices to be reported to London, or ordering the publication of a proclamation of state by the Mayor.⁴⁶ When faced with the prospect of Jacobite rebellion in 1715 the Privy Council authorised Viscount Townshend, in his capacity as Lord Lieutenant for Norfolk, to execute their orders, relaying them directly to Norwich. Letters were immediately dispatched to Norwich, for the Town Clerk, in his function as Clerk of the city's Lieutenancy, and to the Clerk for the Peace. The instructions were then relayed by the Clerks to the city's Deputy Lieutenants, in order for them to raise the militia.⁴⁷ Townshend was required to keep the Privy Council informed, but the city's failure to reply to his orders prompted him to warn the Town Clerk and the Mayor, Peter Attlesey, that the Council's "regard for such a populous City" necessitated its magistracy would have to personally account to them for any "unwarrantable delay" in the execution of their orders.⁴⁸

The ways in which these various offices intersected emphasise that they represented not a strictly linear chain of command, but a hierarchy of jurisdictions which only overlapped at given points. Where the Town Clerk's office, or individuals like Viscount Townshend, performed multiple roles they functioned as nodal points connecting different jurisdictional networks. The administrative transformation of the state which occurred after

⁴⁵ Innes, *Inferior Politics*, pp.50-1

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.53; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/10/9, Order from the House of Commons to return the Price of Corn, 29th Jan. 1766

⁴⁷ Norf. RO, MS 503, Lord Lieutenant's Journal and Papers, pp.42-4, 21st-22nd Jul. 1715

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.46-9

1688 was anything but a root and branch reform, and grafted roles and jurisdictions onto existing offices, mixing medieval and modern institutions.⁴⁹ Consequently many of the practical problems of government faced in the early Stuart period were still relevant a hundred years later. It has been noted that Treasury estimates for Land Tax revenues consistently fell short, in part because it was the responsibility of the parish constabulary and commissions of county gentry to assess the "liabilities of its members and their neighbours".⁵⁰ Similarly the periodic activism of eighteenth-century Justices of the Peace enforcing particular aspects of local governance, such as measures against vagrancy, swearing or disorderly alehouses, did not differ fundamentally from that employed by their predecessors.

Where the city's magistracy parted company with their forebears was in their ability and willingness to petition Parliament in order to secure statutory solutions to administrative problems, as was demonstrated by the efforts taken over the Calico Act (1720), the 1723 act for qualifying freemen, and the 1749 act against embezzlement.⁵¹ Joanna Innes has stated that although the characteristic concerns of central government in the eighteenth-century were basically the same as for the preceding century, how it responded was different.

We find legislation, proclamations, perhaps circular letters urging authorities to act, responsiveness to suggestions from elsewhere, perhaps willingness to expend central funds - but rather little in the way of close monitoring of local activity... Furthermore, although central government sometimes took the lead, it by no means always did: there

⁴⁹ G.E. Aylmer, 'From Office Holding to Civil Service', Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 30 (December 1980); Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, The Development of English Local Government (Oxford, 1963), pp.5-8

⁵⁰ Thomas Ertman, Birth of the Leviathan (Cambridge, 1997), p.214

⁵¹ 7 Geo.I, Stat.1 c.7; 9 Geo.I c.9; 22 Geo.II, c.27

is more evidence of widespread innovative activity by local authorities, in counties as well as in towns, in this period than in the seventeenth-century.⁵²

In particular, the work of both E.P. Thompson and J.C.D Clark has maintained that the secular modernity of the eighteenth-century has been overstated by many historians, whilst they disagree quite fundamentally over whether the social relations were essentially 'conflictual' or 'deferential'.⁵³ There was a great degree of continuity with the preceding century, carrying over many of its patriarchal or paternalist attitudes, idioms and expectations.

Clark considered English society as still largely rural, with urban growth affecting only a minority of the population, and leaving the distinctive hierarchical consensus of 'country' ideology intact. Even in the cities, working relations were characterised not by any cohesive, prematurely conscious working class, but by domestic workshops ordered around a patriarchal sense of hierarchy.⁵⁴ Whilst it is true that domestic production was the norm, it will be demonstrated that its hierarchical distinctions were not so divisive as to prevent subaltern solidarities from developing. In the 1752 woolcombers' dispute it was an alliance of journeymen and smaller masters who combined in defence of the customary system of labour relations.⁵⁵ Similarly, the vestigial survival of "the emotional mould" of patriarchal ideas and values into the eighteenth-century did not entail that the whole edifice of divine right kingship and

⁵² Innes, *Inferior Politics*, pp.61-2

⁵³ Thompson, *Customs in Common*; E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society: class struggle without class?', *Social History* 3:2 (May 1978); J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985)

⁵⁴ Clark, *English Society*, pp.65-70

⁵⁵ See ch.5

non-resistance persisted, particularly after the Hanoverian succession.⁵⁶

By the early eighteenth-century ideas had undergone some change, but the commitment to principles of hierarchy remained in place, as was detailed in Bishop William Fleetwood's sermons on 'Relative Duties,' first published in 1705, and going through three further editions by 1732. Fleetwood stated that hierarchy naturally imposed itself on relations, and the pretence at equality would merely result in dissension and disorder. This was as true for associations as it was for families, which formed the basic building block of society. Such an insistence was not patriarchal in the sense that it necessarily implied the relationship between the monarch and civil society was one of fatherly dominance, which would not have been consistent with Fleetwood's own political beliefs. Rather, it seems to be affirming the old Aristotelian observation that the family was the original of all forms of corporate bodies, and similar principles of hierarchy applied.

the longer People are to live together, the greater is the necessity of Subordination and Subjection one to another, because there will unavoidably rise still more and more occasions of division and difference, which will require the greater Unity; now there can be no such thing as Unity, where two Parties contend for, or pretend to Superiority, or such Equality as will not yield. All this is evident in Kingdoms, Provinces, Cities, and private Corporations, either great, or little.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Clark, English Society, p.69; John Cannon, Aristocratic Century (Cambridge, 1984), p.150-5

⁵⁷ W. Fleetwood, The relative duties (London, 1705), p.167

E.P. Thompson viewed the patriarchal relations of the eighteenth-century as rooted in a kind of reciprocal bargaining, of *plebeian* and *patrician* assuming normative roles, demanding deference of one and paternalism of the other.⁵⁸ However, such a relationship did not necessitate that the poor shared the gentry's terms and conditions, nor their perception of the nature of their relationship. Rather, custom, expectation and expediency meant "the poor imposed upon the rich some of the duties and functions of paternalism, just as much as deference was in turn imposed upon them."⁵⁹

Building on these insights early modern historians' attention to the role of local office holding has helped to explicate a number of critical points about the state, and made more fundamental observations about power and governance as negotiated processes. The relationship between ruler and ruled was not simply a 'top-down' arrangement, but depended on a significant degree of reciprocity. In particular, there has been a realisation that governance could in practice only claim authority by being recognised by its subjects as legitimate. Petty officer and grandee alike needed to prove their authority; their credibility was conferred not solely by "the formal limits of office, but also about appropriate behaviour and comportment".⁶⁰

In other words, the ability to govern was dependent less on coercive power than it was on the ability to claim authority by presenting the exercise of power as legitimate. Claims to legitimacy could appeal to tradition, providence or conquest, but most characteristically to an impartial legal authority, embodying standards of law and the public benefit.⁶¹ In principle this offered a reciprocal compact between governors and governed, constraining

⁵⁸ Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society', p.150

⁵⁹ E.P. Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', in Customs in Common, p.85

⁶⁰ Braddick, State Formation, p.21

⁶¹ Christopher Pierson, The Modern State (London, 2004), p.18

officeholders to govern in particular ways, recognised as normative, and thereby laying "claim not just to legal validity, but to legitimacy".⁶² However the reciprocal basis of constructing authority provided the governed, even the most disadvantaged, with some small degree of power. If the nature of their relationship was by definition hierarchical and unequal, its terms also gave them some say in how they expected and assented to be governed.

For ritual to function and operate it must first of all present itself and be perceived as legitimate, with stereotyped symbols serving precisely to show that this agent does not act in his own name and on his own authority, but in his capacity as a delegate... The symbolic efficacy of words is exercised only in so far as the person subjected to it recognizes the person who exercises it as authorized to do so.⁶³

It is not then enough, when attempting to interpret the political vernacular used in these exchanges and negotiations, to simply study the utterance in reference to a distinct political idiom, relating it to prior and subsequent utterances. One also needs to ground these expressive acts in the specific sets of social relations and mentalities in which they're produced and received, remembering that such mediating rules of etiquette or of law "only exist in their recognition by the members of society".⁶⁴ It is precisely in this capacity to negotiate claims to the recognisable authority to speak legitimately that such popular political discourse makes itself manifest. The discursive idiom itself functions as a field for differing

⁶² Braddick, State Formation, p.71

⁶³ Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power (Cambridge, 1992), pp.115-6

⁶⁴ A.R. Radcliffe Brown, Structure and Function in Primitive Society (London, 1952), p.198

usages and competing interests, for negotiating political recognition and representation.

Governors' commitment to legalism provided what James C. Scott called a 'public transcript', defining "the repertoire of acceptable public behaviour between superior and subordinate", and which provided the shared discourse mediating such negotiations, and veiling sometimes conflicting motives and interests.⁶⁵ Consequently the outward display of deference and paternalistic care of hegemonic social relations often conceal more complicated dependencies, based on negotiation and accommodation.⁶⁶ The case studies presented in this thesis examine how these 'hidden transcripts' are revealed in this process, looking at the narrative resources which were available to establish and contest legitimacy, and the groups that formed around and utilised them.

3. Norwich's system of political representation

One of the most significant factors in shaping events in Norwich was the size, and social range, of its electorate. This situation contributed to a highly developed sense of popular political engagement, a fact illustrated by the numbers who turned out to vote in municipal elections, which sometimes outstripped the parliamentary elections. In the partisan climate of 1710 more than three thousand citizens, accounting for more than ten *per cent* of

⁶⁵ James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance (New Haven and London, 1990), pp.2-5; Michael J. Braddick and John Walter, 'Grids of power: order, hierarchy and subordination in early modern society', in Braddick and Walter (ed.), Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society (Cambridge, 2001), p.5

⁶⁶ Howard Newby, 'The Deferential Dialectic', Comparative Studies in Society and History 17:2 (Apr. 1975)

the city's total population, cast their votes to nominate a Mayor for the following year.⁶⁷

Although my thesis is not principally concerned with electoral politics, it played a critical role in the growth and development of a distinctively open and inclusive civic political culture. Not only did Norwich possess an unusually large electorate for the time, by virtue of its freeman and freeholder franchise, but its citizenry also retained a say in the appointment of most of the city's most powerful and prestigious corporate offices, voting annually for the Mayor, one of the city's sheriffs and its common councillors. However, the political contests which occurred around elections and the formal processes of representative politics also mobilised a significant number of the city's unenfranchised population. Although unable to vote, many were active in the politicking, public demonstrations of support and in the eruptions of unrest which frequently accompanied Norwich's elections. It is my contention that as important as electoral politics was in itself, its role in encouraging the growth of an open political culture, extending involvement and dialogue beyond the freeman electorate, was no less significant and provided a valuable source of shared social capital for the inhabitants of the city.⁶⁸ It is therefore important to have an understanding of the role that corporate office-holding and electoral politics played in the city during this period.

Norwich was divided into four large municipal wards: Conesford, Mancroft, Wymer and Over the Water. These wards were subdivided into twelve small wards, three to each great ward. Administrative changes made over the first half of the fifteenth-century, and based on the municipal arrangements for the City of London, created a Mayor for the city and made Norwich a county as well as a city, with

⁶⁷ Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of the City of Norwich

⁶⁸ See ch.2

two sheriffs installed under the Mayor. A Mayor's council of twenty four aldermen were elected for life, with a common council of sixty, appointed annually by the citizenry.⁶⁹

Ultimately power resided in the city's assembly, a legislature formed from the Mayor's Court and Common Council combined. However the more illustrious body was the Mayor's Court of the aldermen and sheriffs, who under the Mayor, presiding as Justice of Peace for the city, combined legislative, executive and judicial functions.⁷⁰ Each alderman was elected by the freemen and freeholders for a given small ward to represent it for life, with two aldermen appointed for each small ward, for which they acted as magistrates, "responsible for keeping the peace and carrying out official orders."⁷¹ However the aldermen did not preside over separate leet courts in their wards, with their affairs dealt with collectively within the Mayor's Court, operating as a Petty Sessions of the Peace.⁷²

The freemen citizenry and freeholders of the city annually elected one of the sheriffs for the city, with the other appointed by the aldermen and sheriffs in the Court of Mayoralty. The common councillors were elected by the voters in their respective wards, although after the 1729 Norwich Election Act the process of this arrangement was somewhat altered.⁷³ Although the Mayor presided over the corporation bodies, including its elections, he was not part of the Common Council, which appointed its own Speaker.⁷⁴

Strictly speaking, the electorate's vote was enabled only to nominate two candidates for Mayor from the body of aldermen, with the final decision made by the Mayor's Court. However the citizenry

⁶⁹ Rev. William Hudson, How the City of Norwich Grew into Shape (Norwich, 1896), pp.65-6

⁷⁰ Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2 (London, 1908), p.532

⁷¹ Hudson, How the City of Norwich Grew into Shape, p.67

⁷² Webb and Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2, p.540

⁷³ See ch.3

⁷⁴ Webb and Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2, p.533

were often able to claim greater influence than this system implies, and in 1710, when only Whig candidates were nominated, the freemen were in effect voting directly for a Whig Mayor, with the largely Tory aldermen offered a straight choice between the two.⁷⁵ Certainly William Massey's description of the city's affairs in the 1720s indicates that although the freeman vote for mayor was formally decided by the aldermen in council, ordinarily a candidate "having an indisputable Majority was declar'd Mayor Elect."⁷⁶ The rioting following the Mayoral elections in 1728, whilst party tensions ran high, was in part prompted by delays in appointing the Tory candidate, who had gained the majority of freeman votes.⁷⁷

The constables were appointed for the wards of the city, rather than the parishes, and like other corporation officers answered directly to the Mayor's authority. Consequently the role of the parish vestries seem to have been less important than was the case elsewhere. The churchwardens and overseers still attended to parochial administration, but because of corporate, city-wide strategies were largely prompted by the corporation. The implementation of the measures of the Workhouse Act after 1712 in particular underlines the lessening power of the parish overseers, who, although responsible for assessments and collections, had no say in the dispensation of relief.⁷⁸ To a significant extent this placed many of the concerns of the parochial rate payers with the corporation rather than the parish itself.

Norwich's freeman and freeholder franchise secured participation for a "wider and deeper" cross-section of urban society, not restricted to the landed and mercantile elite, but extending to men of more

⁷⁵ G.J.A. Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens (Stanford University, 1985), p.387

⁷⁶ Norf. RO, RYE MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.26

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp.104-6

⁷⁸ See ch.3

modest means.⁷⁹ The descriptions of freemen enrolments are not always particularly helpful in gauging any useful sense of the social rank or wealth of voters. A 'Weaver' could designate a journeyman artisan, a small master, or one of the city's wealthiest merchant-manufacturers. Similarly a 'Grocer' might apply to either the large wholesale merchants or a shop owner.⁸⁰ However, given the number of freemen and freeholders voting, and a reasonable sense of the general levels of wealth, based on earlier figures for rate payers, it becomes evident that many of the city's voters did not possess any great fortune or status, although equally it also did not extend to the city's large population of labouring poor. Using the rate figures, Nicholas Rogers estimated that almost two thirds (66.1%) of the voters in the 1710 parliamentary election were artisans, largely concerned in the city's textile trades.⁸¹

Citing growing population and inflation in making the 40 shilling freehold available to many more, Plumb noted that the political changes of the seventeenth-century "had called into being a wider political nation than this, and one far less easy to control."⁸² Poll books were introduced in the 1690s as a means of marshalling the increased number of voters, and made it easier to canvass and mobilise them, alongside the introduction of an efficient postal system.⁸³ Where party organisation and activity was strongest there was more likely to be competition and contest at elections, and consequently the electorate's influence was brought more into play.

In the course of the seventeenth-century the citizen electorate frequently came into conflict with the city's magistracy, and this dynamism contributed to what was perhaps a uniquely open political culture. This combination of factors was interpreted by

⁷⁹ W.A. Speck, *Tory & Whig* (London, 1970), p.21

⁸⁰ Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities* (Oxford, 1989), p.329

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.331-2

⁸² J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England* (London, 1967), p.27

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp.43-4

Evans as the decisive factor in preventing oligarchy from developing in the city.⁸⁴ The extent to which Norwich can be considered as having been subject to oligarchical control at the beginning of the eighteenth-century is however open to question. The position detailed by Peter Clark and Paul Slack, and subsequently reemphasised by Robert Tittler, presented sixteenth- and seventeenth-century changes to civic corporations in England as concentrating political authority in the hands of narrowly defined urban elites, through whom the Crown was better able to more directly wield control.⁸⁵

The exclusion of the general freemanry from the governing process, the replacement of election by co-option, the circumvention of the traditional *cursus honorum*, the restriction of positions of authority to particular families, even the invitation of well-connected outsiders – allies to elite townsmen – to assume borough offices, could all be carried out with a semblance of due process.⁸⁶

Evans' study of seventeenth-century Norwich questioned whether such a set of circumstances had existed there at all, arguing that the corporation had not been subject to domination by any particular group of individuals or families, and possessed a significant degree of mobility within the ranks of its civic elite.⁸⁷ Furthermore if the later seventeenth-century was marked by ongoing political antagonism between the Earl of Yarmouth and the first Viscount Townshend their continuous wrangling for influence

⁸⁴ John T. Evans, 'The Decline of Oligarchy in Seventeenth-Century Norwich', Journal of British Studies 14:1 (Nov. 1974), p.76

⁸⁵ Peter Clark and Paul Slack, 'Introduction' in Clark and Slack, Crisis and Order, pp.22-3; Robert Tittler, The Reformation and the Towns in England (Oxford, 1998)

⁸⁶ Tittler, The Reformation and the Towns, p.186

⁸⁷ John T. Evans, 17th Century Norwich (Oxford, 1979), p.319

prevented either one dominating the city's politics.⁸⁸ The influence of the Dukes of Norfolk on local affairs had not been significant in the latter half of the seventeenth-century, but, although generally absent from the county, the 7th Duke could, at the turn of the century, still serve as a focus for political loyalty amongst a section of the county. Rival aristocratic interests in Norfolk, grouped around the Duke and the 2nd Viscount Townshend respectively, have been interpreted by James Rosenheim as indicating the primacy of patronage and local issues above national ones in Norfolk's county politics of the period.⁸⁹ While there is little indication that this was also the case for the city's politics, Norwich seemed to guard its independence from aristocratic patronage jealously.

When the new Duke visited the city in 1708 for a period of residence, the mayor refused him a grand entry, accompanied by trumpeters. The Duke took the refusal as a personal slight and abandoned his seat in the city, having most of the palace demolished several years later, and part of the remaining structure later leased to house the city workhouse.⁹⁰ The Duke, in the highly partisan atmosphere which persisted in the city at that time, might have rallied the city's Tory faction about him and promoted conflict, a fact which would not have been lost on the Whig mayor. However the attempts to downplay the Duke's entry to the city might have stemmed as much from the desire to minimise any possibility of aristocratic influence and patronage on city politics.⁹¹

Humphrey Prideaux, writing in 1708, stated that the Earl of Yarmouth's star had fallen: heavily indebted, with "scarce a servant to attend him", and unwilling to resolve his affairs. By contrast the

⁸⁸ Mark Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1950', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, Norwich since 1550, p.171; Evans, 17th Century Norwich, p.322-3

⁸⁹ Humphrey Prideaux, Letters (London, 1885), pp.194-5; James M. Rosenheim, The Townshends of Raynham (Middletown, 1989), pp.31-2, 194

⁹⁰ Francis Blomefield, The History of the City and County of Norwich (Norwich, 1745), p.698; Basil Cozens-Hardy, The Mayors of Norwich (Norwich, 1938), p.110

⁹¹ Corfield, Social and Economic History, p.234

influence of Charles Townshend, the second Viscount, had grown virtually undisputed, "ascendent here over everybody... not only in the county but also in all the corporations".⁹² However Townshend's reputation was based not on any personal mastery of either county or city politics, and his periodic involvement in the city's political affairs do not seem to have been indicative of any greater sense of control.⁹³ After the Tory parliamentary triumph of 1710 Townshend's personal reputation in the county was shaken, but not permanently damaged, by the prominent role he had played in the deposed Whig ministry. The Norfolk Tories entreated Harley, worried that their interest in the county was weakening without the prestige afforded by a greater influence over affairs under the new ministry, and precipitated Townshend's removal from the Lord Lieutenancy of the county, with the Duke of Ormonde appointed in his stead.⁹⁴

However, the relative openness of the representative political system before the Hanoverian succession was not sustained across the century that followed. Between 1689 and 1715 there were twelve general elections, provoking fierce partisan competition in most constituencies. This represented almost as many elections as took place for the remainder of the eighteenth-century, and seats became less frequently contested.⁹⁵ The Septennial Act was pushed through on the back of Robert Walpole's active lobbying and secured elections every seven, rather than every three, years, on the basis that it occasioned greater expense and "more violent and lasting heats and animosities among the subjects of this realm".⁹⁶ In Plumb's view the Act constituted a decisive step in the "drift towards oligarchical control", in which the Whigs under Walpole

⁹² Prideaux, Letters, p.200

⁹³ Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, pp.404-7

⁹⁴ Rosenheim, The Townshends of Raynham, pp.216-21

⁹⁵ Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability, p.71

⁹⁶ 1 Geo.I, st.2 c.38

used a range of measures to reduce opposition, and establish their dominance of Parliamentary and provincial politics.⁹⁷ In the constituencies with the largest electorates, such as Norwich, this change was less pronounced, with more manageable costs providing less of an impediment and consequently elections continued to be contested at levels approaching those of the earlier period.⁹⁸ After 1715 legislative measures led to a gradual narrowing of the electorate, and it has been noted that representation in general was at higher levels before 1715 than it was to be until long after the passing of the first Reform Act in the nineteenth-century.⁹⁹

Indeed the influence of the electorate in this period led to a common practice of manipulating votes, by using temporary conveyances for freeholders or making freemen, either by purchase or corporation orders.¹⁰⁰ In early eighteenth-century Norwich this practice became a successful means of influencing elections, used on a number of occasions to mobilise partisan support, and prompted investigation by the corporation, until dealt with more decisively by the Norwich Elections Act of 1729. In December 1723 when John Pell was elected as alderman for Middle Wymer ward, his Tory opponent's supporters claimed that all the votes of inmates of the Hospital should be disallowed, as well as the prisoners in custody and anyone receiving alms. Their complaints went unheeded, being considered "too great an Infringem[en]t on the Rights of Freemen", although in principle it granted the magistrates liberty to corral their dependent inmates who were eligible to vote in support of the corporation candidate.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability*, p.174

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.73; Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1950', p.168

⁹⁹ Speck, *Tory & Whig*, p.17

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.16

¹⁰¹ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.48; Edward Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons vol.I* (New York, 1963), p.69

Although willing to employ any practical means to secure political advantage, in Norwich, as elsewhere, large electorates were perceived as posing a threat to the settled political order and in the 1720s greater attention was paid to restricting numbers voting, and reducing electoral competition. A contested aldermanic election in 1725, in which the fiercely Whig captain of the Loyal Artillery Company was elected to the Mayor's Court, turned up several cheats who had registered votes for his Tory opponent. One lived in a different ward, and his vote was discounted, but the other did not possess the freedom, and was committed to the city gaol, and later pilloried for perjury.¹⁰²

Such concerns were not exclusive to the Hanoverian Whigs. Speck noted that in the eleven cases between 1701 and 1715 where the House of Commons was asked to determine between a wide or narrow borough franchise, they opted for the narrower nine times. Indeed, Parliamentary calls for reducing the size of the electorate had not been uncommon after 1688.¹⁰³ Moreover, such calls were not exclusive to any particular partisan position, although the Tories were generally rather more reticent about smaller electorates, on the basis it made voters more susceptible to bribery by the moneyed grandees of the Whig interest.¹⁰⁴

Corfield has indicated that in this period the city magnates constituted a provincial 'pseudo-gentry' who followed "the dictates of county and London society... [and] no longer governed as municipal officials but as justices of the peace".¹⁰⁵ From the 1720s onwards the composition of the corporate offices can be seen to have become increasingly oligarchic. The city's mayors and

¹⁰² Norf. RO, RYE MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.65; NG, 5th Mar. 1726

¹⁰³ John Cannon, Parliamentary Reform (Cambridge, 1972), p.33

¹⁰⁴ Speck, Tory & Whig, pp.14-5

¹⁰⁵ Clark and Slack, 'Introduction', p.34; Alan Everitt, 'Social Mobility in Early-Modern England', Past and Present 33 (Apr 1966), p.71

aldermen were drawn from a narrower urban elite, and the 1729 Act reduced the impact of the popular vote and the freemen's influence on corporation politics. Although Norwich still retained a relatively open constitution, the ruling elite increasingly comprised a much more homogeneous and socially selective set of interests, "self-assured and self-contained," dominating the corporation, even in the absence of aristocratic or gentry patronage.¹⁰⁶

By the 1750s the city's civic offices were more settled and less subject to partisan contest, in some cases becoming more hereditary in nature. The city's parliamentary representation reflected this shift, with the city appointing Harbord Harbord, cousin of the outgoing representative John Hobart, and Edward Bacon, son of another former MP for Norwich.¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Wilson found evidence of a "rapprochement being forged between the Whig and Tory elites in this period, a closing of the ranks of class and political power against threats to the status quo."¹⁰⁸

John Phillips, looking at the elections of 1761 and 1768, rightly discerns hints concerning the social factors underpinning people's allegiances. The propaganda against Edward Bacon in the 1768 election branded him an enemy to the poor, and the supporters of his rival, the Independent candidate Thomas Beevor, were notably "the middle rank of People, the Tradesmen, and young Folks."¹⁰⁹ This fact is confirmed by Philips, who found the middling and lower occupational ranks were twice as likely to vote for Beevor and against Bacon.¹¹⁰ We have, however, to be very wary of getting carried away and appealing freely to class-based notions of electoral politics before that time. For the 1730s Rogers found the levels of

¹⁰⁶ Corfield, *Social and Economic History*, pp.232-4

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.404-5; Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p.342

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, *The sense of the people*, p.406

¹⁰⁹ John A. Phillips, *Electoral Behavior in Unreformed England* (Princeton, 1982), pp.168-9

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.267

wealth of Tory and Whig voters to be largely comparable, and their voting was motivated less by economic than by ideological factors.¹¹¹

4. Contest and party in eighteenth-century Norwich

As Philips observed in his study of later eighteenth-century Norwich politics, party organisation within the locality was "at best loosely tied to the flexible and variable parliamentary parties."¹¹² Writing about a period more than fifty years earlier, Guth similarly referred to the issues which had animated Norwich's partisan disagreements as "Local controversies... refracted through the prism of national ideology."¹¹³

Guth's analysis of the Norwich elections in the first two decades of the eighteenth-century showed the party distinctions between Tory and Whig to be clearly drawn, with the city's electors displaying a high degree of politicisation, evident in the consistency of their voting.¹¹⁴ The party divisions in Norwich had a clear basis in religious differences, and specifically in the growing influence of members of the city's dissenting communities, although Speck's analysis of political propaganda indicates that from the early 1720s onwards social and economic issues came to the fore, in large part displacing the prominence of religious polemic.¹¹⁵ Guth has stated that the dissenting interest in this period was not limited only to those active in meeting house congregations. It also encompassed what she calls 'cultural dissenters', whose forebears had been non-

¹¹¹ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, pp.330-1

¹¹² Philips, *Electoral Behavior*, p.115

¹¹³ Guth, *Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens*, p.792

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.786-8

¹¹⁵ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p.308; W.A. Speck, 'Political Propaganda in Augustan England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5:22 (Dec. 1972), p.21

conformists and Presbyterians, and, while not religiously committed themselves, could not in good conscience support the religious policies of Toryism.¹¹⁶ High church militancy was a major factor in the Tories' national success in the 1710 parliamentary election, following the effects of the Sacheverell trial in mobilising mass support for the "church in danger".¹¹⁷

The civic leadership of the city, prior to the Hanoverian succession, was still under the sway of the Tories, although this domination was not reflected in either their parliamentary representation or control of the church, where a Whig hierarchy in the cathedral employed their powers of patronage to appoint a sympathetic parochial clergy.¹¹⁸ These partisan divisions were particularly hard fought at given times, as in 1705, when Guth cited evidence that attempts by the Tory Mayor, William Blyth, and the Sheriffs to influence the city's elections were motivated by partisan factionalism arising from religious divisions.¹¹⁹ Attempts by the Tories to 'tack' an occasional conformity bill onto an Act going through Parliament, and supported by the city's MPs, raised political tensions in the city, leading to the Whig dissenters accusing the Tories of Jacobitism, and mobilising more organised opposition.¹²⁰

When the Whig candidate, Thomas Dunch, secured the majority of votes in an aldermanic election in March 1705, the Tory-dominated Mayor's Court ruled him uncivil and "not a fit person to be admitted into the state, place and degree of an alderman of this city". Claiming that the city's charter treated the freemen's vote as a nomination only, with the final decision residing with the Mayor's

¹¹⁶ Guth, *Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens*, p.783

¹¹⁷ Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1950', p.172

¹¹⁸ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p.309; Wilson, *The sense of the people*, p.380

¹¹⁹ Guth, *Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens*, pp.399-402

¹²⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 8c/15, Case of the City of Norwich concerning a double return made by the sheriffs at the last election, 1705

Court, they ordered a second election.¹²¹ The conduct of the magistrates deepened discord and, coinciding with Parliament being prorogued on 14th March, contributed to increased interest and mobilisation by the local party organisations.¹²² However, the dramatic increase in freeman admissions led to the Mayor imposing a block on further admissions until the forthcoming parliamentary election had been resolved.¹²³

At the second election Dunch actually increased his support, but the Mayor's Court rejected the votes outright and instead appointed his Tory opponent as alderman.¹²⁴ The freemen of the ward, rallied by the city's Whigs, delivered a petition to Lord Townshend for delivery to the Queen and her council, protesting the Mayor and aldermen were "depriving them of their rights".¹²⁵ Roused by the seemingly arbitrary actions of the Tory dominated corporation the freemen returned two Whig candidates at the mayoral election a week later, forcing the largely Tory aldermen to select a Whig as their new elect.¹²⁶

The 1705 parliamentary election followed soon after, and the Mayor's Court used their influence to determine the election in favour of the sitting Tory members for the city. Under the circumstances the voters backed both Whig candidates, although the results were only decided after the House of Commons ruled on a double return for the election posted by the Sheriffs.¹²⁷ Thomas Dunch, having served a mandamus against the city in the King's

¹²¹ TNA, Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, SP 34/6/25, ff.42-5, Orders of Mayor's Court of Norwich, 22nd Mar. 1705

¹²² Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, p.386

¹²³ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayor's Court Book, 21st Apr. 1705, f.193

¹²⁴ TNA, Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, SP 34/6/25B, Orders of Mayor's Court of Norwich, 24th Apr. 1705

¹²⁵ Prideaux, Letters, pp.195-6

¹²⁶ Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, pp.385-7

¹²⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 8c/15, Case of the City of Norwich concerning a double return made by the sheriffs at the last election, 1705

Bench, was finally sworn as an alderman in April 1706, overturning the decision of the Mayor's Court.¹²⁸

Between 1701 and 1715 partisan differences meant that the political representation for the city was contested on every possible occasion.¹²⁹ However after 1715 and the passing of the Septennial Act the political situation appeared to have become more stable, notably in regard to the city's parliamentary representation. This situation was not however reflected in the constant jockeying for position between candidates for corporate offices. William Massey in his contemporary chronicle for the city, detailing the events of the 1720s, indicated that between 1715 and 1721 a shift occurred in the allegiances within the Common Council and Court of Mayoralty, from Tory to Whig domination, and effectively reversing the balance of power.¹³⁰ Between 1720 and 1750 a total of twenty-five members of the city's foremost Presbyterian fellowship entered corporate office, forming the core of the city's Whig faction as well as the city's civic elite.¹³¹ Such a shift was, in no small part, linked to the rising fortunes nationally of the Whigs under George I's rule.

Nicholas Rogers has shown that following the Hanoverian succession Norwich's Whigs, following the national imperative established by the government, were eager to reduce the effects of popular Toryism and secure political stability, even at the expense of redrawing the established political constitution of the city.¹³² The passing of the Riot Act and use of extraordinary police powers, legitimated in defence against Jacobite rebellion, treated opposition as sedition.¹³³ Kathleen Wilson vividly described this process as

¹²⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 8h, Copy of Petition of Freeman Citizens and Inhabitants of Berstrete Ward relative to the Election of Alderman Dunch; Prideaux, Letters, pp.195-6; Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

¹²⁹ Speck, Tory & Whig, p.77

¹³⁰ Norf. RO, RYE 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.30

¹³¹ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.308; Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1950', p.177

¹³² Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.317

¹³³ Wilson, The sense of the people, p.384

nothing less than “state-sponsored terrorism and physical coercion geared toward wiping out political dissent that redefined the party’s relation to the extra-parliamentary nation.”¹³⁴

Massey emphasised the role played by the Loyal Artillery Company, as the vanguard of the Whig cause in the city, both policing and popularising loyalty to the Hanoverian succession.¹³⁵ Where there was a danger that the corporation would be hostile to the crown the militia was often employed as a counterweight, and when Viscount Townshend was reinstated as Lord Lieutenant for the county in 1714, he purged and reshaped the city’s militia as the Loyal Artillery Company, at a time when the corporation was still under Tory control.¹³⁶ The Lord Lieutenant was directly responsible for appointing the commissions for the militia, and after regaining the role Townshend dismissed almost half of the deputies who had served under the Jacobite Duke of Ormonde.¹³⁷ Such political reversals were not commonplace, and the Lord Lieutenancy’s powers of patronage were ordinarily used in a rather more limited fashion than this might suggest, but this was in keeping with the measures taken at the Hanoverian succession to secure power, in the face of popular support for Jacobite claims and the threat of invasion.

In the aftermath of George I assuming the throne the actions of the Artillery Company, even where coming into conflict with the corporation and the peace of the city, were given the protection of the government, with the efforts of the Tory Mayor, Peter Attlesey, to prosecute several of them for rioting quashed.¹³⁸ Attlesey had denied the Artillery Company the use of the city’s New Hall, and was

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.98

¹³⁵ Norf. RO, RYE 18, William Massey, *Acta Norviciensa* vol.I, p.30

¹³⁶ J.R. Western, *The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1965), p.66

¹³⁷ Rosenheim, *The Townshends of Raynham*, p.228

¹³⁸ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p.314

apparently intent on denying them any institutional support to bolster their political ambitions.¹³⁹ Henry Crossgrove, the highly partisan Tory proprietor of the *Norwich Gazette*, saw Townshend's motives as purely political, and lamented that the militia "being all of the Oliverian Cut, strangely insult & dragoon us... who are of a contrary Kidney to themselves".¹⁴⁰ Crossgrove was himself subject to the persistent attention of the authorities, "as my Business is publick, & my writings, as well as Principles counter to theirs, I am continually Binding over, & Presenting by Juries".¹⁴¹

The Loyal Artillery Company's engagement with the public went beyond simply bullying local elections however, and included shooting contests on Mousehold Heath and an annual venison feast – pointing up the influence of their patrons by putting game on the table – to which all gentlemen of the public "who are Lovers of the present happy Establishment" were welcome, on purchase of a ticket from the city's coffee houses.¹⁴² Their ceremonial calendar of holidays included the protestant succession and the birthdays of the Hanoverian royal family, staging public displays of loyalty.

The centrality of the trade in textiles to Norwich's economic wellbeing and the resultant efforts to protect the stability of their domestic and overseas markets meant the city had to be more outward-facing than many urban centres, aware of maintaining close links with the diplomatic and military initiatives of the executive. In November 1719 the corporation was at the forefront of the weaving towns who petitioned the House of Commons that their trade was languishing, "under such Discouragements by the universal wear of East India Goods, Callicoes, and printed

¹³⁹ Guth, *Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens*, p.479

¹⁴⁰ British Library, MS Add. 5853, Crossgrove Strype Correspondence, 21st Mar. 1714/5, f.556

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2nd Dec. 1714, f.555

¹⁴² *NM*, 17th Aug 1728

Linens".¹⁴³ The corporation mobilised its members and political allies, including Horatio and Robert Walpole, to throw their weight behind moves to restrict the sale of calicos. Their import threatened the city's stability and prosperity, which was heavily dependent on the domestic trade in woollen stuffs, and it was chiefly the corporation's lobbying which drove the campaign.¹⁴⁴

The active support and influence of Robert Walpole was integral to their gaining the legislation, and his political ascendancy made his good favour all the more important to the corporation. As the foremost figure in the county's politics, as well as the nation's, he maintained close links with Norwich. His lawyer and broker Robert Britiffe acted as an organiser for the Whigs in Norwich, as well serving as one of the city's members of parliament. His management of Walpole's interests saw him oversee the purchase in 1720 of a number of country estates in Norfolk, with the express aim of securing for the Walpoles greater influence over both Norwich and Yarmouth. Walpole's brother Horatio served as a member of parliament for both boroughs in turn, with Britiffe standing down in his stead, to be appointed Recorder for the city.¹⁴⁵ Walpole's premiership was considered generally conducive to the city's economic interests, and his influence garnered several measures, such as sumptuary orders for the wearing of Norwich crapes during court mourning, which stimulated the demand for Norwich textiles.¹⁴⁶

The Whig-dominated city corporation was, in general, loyal to Walpole's ministry, which had been supportive of the merchant-

¹⁴³ The Journals of the House of Commons vol.19 (London, 1803), pp.168, 176, 182

¹⁴⁴ John Smith, Chronicon Rusticum Commerciale vol.II (London, 1747), p.276

¹⁴⁵ J.H. Plumb, Robert Walpole: The Making of a Statesman (London, 1956), pp.209-10, 309-12; Rosenheim, The Townshends of Raynham, p.226; Paul Langford, The Excise Crisis (Oxford, 1975), pp.41-2

¹⁴⁶ John James, History of the Worsted Manufacture in England (London, 1857), pp.220-1

manufacturing interest, although their support was not unconditional. When Walpole proposed in 1732 to reduce the Land Tax to one shilling whilst increasing excise duties, the measures proved a source of great dissension, and the corporation of Norwich sent instructions for the city's representatives to oppose the bill, expressing concern that by raising duties on necessities it would automatically push up wages. Despite their opposition to the excise, in 1734 the city elected both Whig representatives to parliament.¹⁴⁷

Nicholas Rogers' account of Norwich politics in this period is one of a Tory party in terminal decline, passive in the face of Whig manoeuvring and buoyed only by the periodic eruptions of popular political support. Following years as a waning presence in the city's corporation politics the dramatic electoral reversal in 1728 created a Tory majority in the Common Council, causing the Tory dominated parishes ordering "the Bells to be rung and ye pot-guns to be fired, and made public Rejoycings as if they had obtain'd some signal Victory or Deliverance".¹⁴⁸ The Tory revival prompted the withdrawal of the predominantly Whig aldermen from the city assembly in a move calculated to limit the corporation's practical ability to govern. The aldermen followed their separation by lobbying for a bill intended to reduce the influence of the electorate on civic institutions, and which would also serve to weaken Toryism as a viable political power.¹⁴⁹ Rogers noted that even in the face of such measures the Tory party offered no opposition to the Whig's application to Parliament.¹⁵⁰

Tory attempts in 1741 to field candidates capable of splitting the Whigs' support, selecting Edward Bacon and Alderman William

¹⁴⁷ William Kennedy, English Taxation 1640-1799 (London, 1913), pp.96-112; J.H. Plumb, Sir Robert Walpole: The King's Minister (London, 1960), pp.236-44; Langford, The Excise Crisis, p.108

¹⁴⁸ Norf. RO, RYE MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.104

¹⁴⁹ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.320-1

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p.323

Clarke to stand in their interest, have been taken by Rogers as indicative of how spent a force they were in the city by this time.¹⁵¹ They do seem however to have been far from exhausted in popular street politics. There is clearly some truth to the narrative recounted by Rogers, but it draws attention to the obvious disjunction between the sense of a local Tory party in unchecked decline, and the robust Toryism of the popular “out-of-doors” political culture, which requires further clarification.

Whilst it is true that the Tories lost the political ascendancy and overall control of both the Mayor’s Court and the Common Council after the Hanoverian succession, parliamentary elections remained far more closely contested. Mark Knights has pointed out that it was the norm for the parties to be separated by no more than a few hundred votes.¹⁵² Furthermore, the elections for the representative municipal offices continued to be vigorously contested, with the demand for scrutinies becoming a common feature, testifying to the spirit of competition which persisted.¹⁵³

William Massey’s record of affairs in the city between 1721 and 1725 records disputes over five contests for alderman, for the election of the freemen’s sheriff in 1722 and a second poll requested for the election of Mayoral candidates in 1723.¹⁵⁴ The shrieval and aldermanic elections were more often than not contested, so the Whig domination of power was certainly not unopposed, as might be supported anecdotally by the paper war which raged between the proprietors of the Tory-Jacobite *Norwich Gazette* and Whig-Loyalist *Norwich Mercury*. Guth believed that such political contests continued to be fought by parties, and not individuals, until at least 1722, and, if true, this would suggest a

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.338

¹⁵² Knights, ‘Politics, 1660-1950’, p.172

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.174

¹⁵⁴ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, pp.29, 34-7, 40, 47-8, 65

rather more active Tory presence throughout the 1720s, and providing a greater sense of continuity with the Tories' electoral revival in 1728.¹⁵⁵

Both Rogers and Wilson have identified the importance of the 1723 act, intended to bring in more freemen from the city's textile trades, where support for the Whigs was strongest, whilst also noting that the bill had been actively promoted by the Tory aldermen Thomas Harwood and Edward Weld.¹⁵⁶ Following the act, the Tory opposition was nonetheless able to consolidate their virtually unchallenged control of the city's large and prosperous Mancroft ward, galvanising a broad opposition to the Whig-dominated corporation. The corporation's opposition critics in general disputed the Whigs' identification of trade and the common good with the interests of the city's textile manufactory.¹⁵⁷

The municipal politics of the 1720s, rather than being characterised by Tory disarray and inertia, might be better described rather differently. The support of several prominent Tories in the city's administration was instrumental in securing the 1723 Act. Similarly Tory inaction over the 1729 Elections Act and bipartisan accommodations in the latter half of the 1720s not to contest certain wards, suggest that the concerns of the city's political governors were not exclusively adversarial.¹⁵⁸ Although the acts of 1723 and 1729 clearly had party political consequences, they also served another purpose.

The 1723 Act was the culmination of a quarter of a century of lobbying to bring in the wealthier and more influential manufacturers of the city to bolster the ranks of the civic elite, amidst concerns about the shortage of principal inhabitants eligible

¹⁵⁵ Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, p.481; Wilson, The sense of the people, p.386

¹⁵⁶ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.319-20

¹⁵⁷ Wilson, The sense of the people, pp.391-2

¹⁵⁸ See ch.3

to govern. Similarly the 1729 Act, whilst ceding political advantage to the Whig dominated Mayor's Court, attempted to reduce the sway of the popular vote in disrupting political affairs. Consequently the political events of the 1720s are better seen as representative of a degree of cross-party agreement and support for measures which reduced the influence of the popular vote, and helped to secure a more settled and consistent system of corporation representation. Coincident with the changes to the electoral processes was a body of activity in the House of Commons aimed at reducing the rights and freedoms claimed by the labouring poor: to punish idle and disorderly servants, bind labourers to annual terms of service or fix wages.¹⁵⁹

Although the Whigs' consolidation of political dominance might well have been the catalyst for such a shift, legislation was not primarily the result of partisan adversarialism, but of anxieties about social order and a socially oligarchical tendency to pare back the extent of popular involvement in public affairs, which, as we noted above, can be traced back to the late seventeenth-century. The separation of polite and popular forms of culture was part of a much longer historical process, but one which in the course of the first half of the eighteenth-century accelerated in response to the increasing pressures of the political, social and economic changes clustered around this stage of state formation.

The progressive abridgement of localised popular customs, recreations and rituals was merely one aspect of a much deeper and more profound transformation of society, attempting to restructure and redefine social relations.¹⁶⁰ One effect, which informs and

¹⁵⁹ Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society', p.146

¹⁶⁰ E.P. Thompson, 'Rough Music', in Customs in Common, pp.467-531; Robert W. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations in English Society (Cambridge, 1973), pp.118-171; Peter Burke, Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe (London, 1978), pp.270-81; Peter Borsay, "'All the town's a stage": urban ritual and

connects the episodes which follow, was the tendency towards defining legal and political authority by formal regulation. Authority was becoming defined in rational-legal terms and vested in local governors by virtue of their being subaltern officers of the state, with the authorities attempting to delegitimise "the assumption of quasi-judicial powers by unqualified individuals".¹⁶¹ That such a process of rationalisation went hand-in-hand with these offices becoming more socially selective only emphasises the socially oligarchical effect of such changes.

This is not to claim that party ceased to be an issue. Plumb's account of the political stability of early Hanoverian England likely overstated the completeness of the 'single-party state' realised under Robert Walpole, and in contrast to his argument that by the Excise Crisis in 1733 the Tory party was effectively spent, Linda Colley has demonstrated the continuance of the Tories as a legitimate political force.¹⁶² As J.C.D. Clark has argued, if the Tories only had a low profile in Parliament, then "Party identities and stereotypes had a momentum of their own which the tactical vicissitudes of the parliamentary parties could not modify overnight."¹⁶³ Plumb recognised that even as the proscription of the Tories under the early Hanoverians rendered them less viable as a parliamentary party, there remained considerable public sympathy and support for Toryism.¹⁶⁴

The anti-Methodist rioting in the early 1750s is ordinarily cited as an example of the survival of Toryism, and Nicholas Rogers cited it as indicative of the Tory inability to move beyond the sectarianism

ceremony 1660-1800', in Peter Clark (ed.), The Transformation of English Provincial Towns (London, 1984), pp.246-52

¹⁶¹ Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', in Barry Reay (ed.), Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England (New York, 1985), p.192

¹⁶² Linda Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy (Cambridge, 1982)

¹⁶³ J.C.D. Clark, 'The Decline of Party, 1740-1760', English Historical Review 93:368 (Jul. 1978), p.521

¹⁶⁴ Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability, pp.172-3

common to the opening decades of the century.¹⁶⁵ However the concerns of the rioters were perhaps rather more complex than this would seem to imply. Further examination of events reveal underlying concerns about both corporation politics and social stability, during a period when the city's manufacturing elite and the corporation conspired to change the customary balance of labour relations. Jacobite and Tory rhetoric was available to the crowd as a means of expressing opposition and criticism of the negligence of corporation governance.¹⁶⁶ To a similar end, defence of normative, customary expectations of corporate paternalism after the 1766 Norwich bread riots could be employed as an instrument for provoking more general criticism of corporation oligarchy and corruption.¹⁶⁷

Kathleen Wilson and Mark Knights have both drawn attention to the fact that the success of the Whigs in engrossing the civic authorities, and their anti-populist measures to secure their position, helped bolster the city's popular Toryism as the most recognisable expression of political opposition.¹⁶⁸ Rogers quotes an informant's report from Norwich to the Secretaries of State in 1722 that "the Mobb are spirited up to such a Degree... that all who are well affected to the government are hiss'd at, and curst as they go in the streets."¹⁶⁹ The rhetoric of patriotic opposition to corruption appealed to the nostalgic traditionalism and anti-authoritarianism of many, and led William Pulteney to assert that "Two thirds of the nation were Tories".¹⁷⁰ Anti-authority feelings – whether in opposition to ministry or corporation – could find expression in a

¹⁶⁵ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.342

¹⁶⁶ See ch.4 and ch.5

¹⁶⁷ See ch.6

¹⁶⁸ Wilson, The sense of the people, pp.122-4, 384-6; Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1950', pp.173-4

¹⁶⁹ Rogers, Crowds, Culture, and Politics, pp.42-3

¹⁷⁰ Plumb, The Making of a Statesman, p.31. See also Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy, pp.146-61; Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and His Circle (Cambridge MA, 1968), pp.48-55

vocabulary of recognised gestures of defiance, and in particular the adoption of Jacobite symbolism, with its nostalgic overtones, could be employed to this end. What was important was its capacity to be recognised as a sign of opposition, and allowed it to be employed more flexibly, as an accessible instrumental discourse.¹⁷¹ Colley identified a tension between the concern of the Tory squires or governors for preserving the social proprieties of hierarchical order in their localities, and the Tory parliamentarians' rhetorical identification with the "socially and politically dispossessed".¹⁷² The apparently contradictory nature of this tension was not easily resolved, and in practice frequently necessitated placing concerns for civic order and the peace of the city above partisan differences.

Rather than the redundancy of Norwich's Tories as a political force, from the 1720s there seems to have been a greater measure of accommodation within the ranks of the civic elite. Although competition continued between the parties, the decision not to contest the elections for certain wards and Tory backing for anti-populist measures was indicative of another strain to the city's politics, which qualifies the stark adversarialism of the picture recounted by Rogers, and to a lesser degree Wilson. The concern for social stability and the shared interests of the upper echelons of the citizenry provided the basis for a degree of cooperation.

Party designations continued to be meaningful, and the accommodations between the Whig and Tory grandees of Norwich were perhaps in no small measure opportunist and flexible, and did not necessarily command complete unanimity. Some were more or less moderate in their beliefs and allegiances, or more or less open to the idea of minimising populist influence on government. However, the characteristic concern of the local governors was with

¹⁷¹ Rogers, Crowds, Culture, and Politics, pp.50-3; E.P. Thompson, Whigs and Hunters (London, 1990), p.164

¹⁷² Colley, In Defiance of Oligarchy, p.173

maintaining social order and the peace of the city, and this concern had to be balanced against religious and ideological differences.

5. Outline of chapters

The chapters that follow recount a number of episodes that reveal how the national political, economic and social changes of the eighteenth-century impacted on the governance of Norwich. The pattern of state formation in this period meant that these localised societies remained largely self-governing, with power still concentrated within that locality. Integration into nationalised networks and markets presented a challenge by dislocating institutionalised relationships which were qualified and negotiated locally. Under this pressure we can examine the reactions of both governors and governed in resisting or adapting to the effects of these changes.

However, if negotiation was the norm in the practical processes of government in the locality, then the nature of these relationships and exchanges between the ruled and the local magistrates were also coming under pressure as a result of the changes which were taking place. The progressive professionalisation and legal formalisation of the rights and privileges of labourers and citizens alike challenged customary expectations. Negotiation and discretion were threatened with displacement by a standardised system of legal definition and enforcement.

In the first chapter we will look at the continuing importance of traditionalist appeals to the past, and how such appeals persisted in the face of change. In the eighteenth-century the past continued to provide a source of authority, and the appeal to tradition and custom provided a rich and persuasive source of legitimation. The

authority of the past was most obvious in the common law tradition, whose influence can be clearly traced from the seventeenth-century through to William Blackstone's *Commentaries*, published between 1765 and 1769, which attempted to systematically represent the patchwork body of the common law as fundamentally consistent and rational, forming the basis of the English constitution.

As a source of authority the past was able to function as a potent source of political ideas: ideas about social order and hierarchy, about how governors were expected to rule, or about the rights and privileges secured by citizenship. These ideas were more-or-less fragmentary, inherited through customary practice and civic memory, and provided an important source of self-identification for its inhabitants. But many of these ideas were also captured in the histories of Norwich, which began to appear from the establishment of the first commercial printers at the beginning of the eighteenth-century. Whilst it is unlikely that every weaver, labourer, shopkeeper or merchant who considered political governance was spending their spare hours reading Harrington, Hobbes or Locke, they would have been exposed to, and informed by, a sense of the civic past. This is not, of course, to say that the ideas expressed by these canonical writers were unimportant, or that their ideas might not trickle down, gradually leaking into public consciousness.

Such sources for representing the city's past were rarely political in their intent, but they articulated the rudiments of a vernacular for expressing political interests, which Rudé has referred to as an 'inherent' form of ideology.¹⁷³ If they lacked the philosophical rigour or even the overtly political character of the canon, they were still able to legitimate and mobilise opinion, possessing enormous force in their ability to articulate and represent ideas which helped shape people's understanding of their nation, society, and their place in it.

¹⁷³ George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (London, 1980), p.28

In the first half of the century the number and frequency of such publications demonstrates there was a market for such items and points to a popular shared interest. But furthermore, the frequent appeals in civic disputes to the city's customs and constitution indicates the city's historical past served as terms of reference to which competing interests appealed.

The wave of printed media which appeared from the beginning of the century, made news and information, but also political discussion and expression, accessible to a far broader sense of the public. Central to recent historical discussion has been the account of the development of public opinion provided by Jürgen Habermas. He argued that it was only at the end of the seventeenth-century that the press assumed the kind of regularity which made it accessible to a general public, and fundamentally transformed the nature of politics by providing a forum for public opinion, mediating a critical dialogue between private people and the state.¹⁷⁴ Even if not fully realised, this culture laid claim to a commitment to disregard individuals' social status in favour of a discourse judged solely by the faculty of reason, in which it projected itself as a universal public. Discussions became purely general, a matter of public opinion, only by virtue of being in principle open to all.¹⁷⁵

Habermas' description of the shift in public discourse offered by print and coffee house culture is highly idealised, and it should be remembered was offered less as a strictly historical account of the period than as a eulogy for Enlightenment modernity's ideals of rational dialogue, necessitating historians appeal to it cautiously.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the commitment to equality of access was in practice far more complicated than such claims suggest, with epistemological

¹⁷⁴ Jürgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (Cambridge, 1992), pp.16-26

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.36-7

¹⁷⁶ Harold Mah, 'Phantasies of the Public Sphere', The Journal of Modern History 72:1 (Mar. 2000), pp.164-8

criteria for determining rational credibility fundamentally unequal. Feminist historians such as Joan Landes have refocused attention on the practical influence of such social inequalities, identifying the fundamental tension "between the formal criteria of abstract moral reason and the goals of substantive rationality."¹⁷⁷ Habermas' claims to universalism have been criticised as inconsistent with the structural separation he postulated between public and private realms, arguing that women's effective exclusion from public life was not an incidental, but a constitutive feature of bourgeois modernity.¹⁷⁸ In spite of this criticism Habermas' notion of the public sphere remains of interest in the way that it identifies a shift in public discourse. Even if the claims to putative equality made at the time failed to reflect the practical reality, then the simple fact of their being articulated had an influence on the subsequent development of ideas about the public, "no longer convinced that public discussion led ineluctably to rebellion."¹⁷⁹

If the past, as represented by custom and popular tradition, provided a powerful source of ideas about governance which was accessible to all, by the beginning of the century it was also considered with disdain in some quarters. This response was the result of a gradual shift, taking place over the course of the early modern period, and in part a corollary of the nationalising processes of state formation under the Tudor and Stuart regimes.¹⁸⁰ The increasing volume of print in the opening decades of the eighteenth-century only sharpened awareness of the need to qualify the

¹⁷⁷ Joan B. Landes, 'The Public and the Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration', in Landes (ed.), Feminism, the Public and the Private (Oxford and New York, 1998), p.141

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.142-4; Pierson, The Modern State, p.74

¹⁷⁹ Steve Pincus, "'Coffee Politicians Does Create'", The Journal of Modern History 67:4 (Dec. 1995), p.832

¹⁸⁰ See D.R. Woolf, 'The "Common Voice": History, Folklore and Oral Tradition in Early Modern England', Past & Present 120 (August 1988); Adam Fox, 'Custom, Memory and the Authority of Writing', in Griffiths, Fox and Hindle, The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1996)

credibility of what was committed to the page. Antiquarianism's application of the methods of legal philology to the past led to a greater measure of contempt for the value of 'vulgar tradition,' and served to create greater distance between polite and popular representations of the past. Forms of knowledge production, much like politics and economic relations, and in spite of the universalist rhetoric of the early enlightenment, were highly sensitive to the question of social degree. There was a social complexion to antiquarians' arguments which called into question the legitimacy of the body of common custom and tradition.

However, even as it struck at popular appeals to the authority of the past as legally unsound, it also offered, via the printed histories, a widely accessible store of examples and ideas which reinforced appeals to past precedent. In the second chapter I look at the contents of these histories in order to determine what its readers found there, and how these outwardly unpromising texts provided a medium for the expression of ideas capable of supporting both the aspirations of the middling sort and a defence of custom and the necessity of paternalist governance.

The representation of Norwich in its histories largely identified it with the textile manufactory, and equated the civic interest with that of the manufacturers. However the reality was rather more pluralistic, and often antagonistic, in contrast to the rhetorical appeal to an organic unity of interest. The histories of early modern England referred to above have helped underline the ineffectiveness of such simplistic unitary definitions to represent the multiplicity of negotiated relationships which existed in both country and city.

The growing wealth and status of the middling rank of Norwich society meant that by the early eighteenth-century they were increasingly numerous, and significant as contributors to the poor rates. Their economic influence, both supporting and driving the

development of a distinctive urban culture, was not necessarily matched by their political influence as citizens. While greater numbers of smaller merchants, master artisans and tradesmen contributed to the financial wellbeing of the city and to the upkeep of the poor, civic power seemed increasingly to be concentrated in the hands of the civic elite. Chapter three focuses on the role of citizenship and the relevance of the freedom of the city in both guarding the economic right to trade in Norwich and as the qualification to serve in a civic office.

The roles of these offices underwent a process of refinement and specialisation in the course of the 1720s, so that the responsibilities and jurisdiction of the Mayor's Court was defined quite differently, coming to function much more as an honorific body. This is not to say that the power and influence of the aldermen was diminished however, as these men were prominent in other official capacities. They controlled the use and expenditure of the resources of not just the corporation, but the city's charitable foundations and the workhouse, and which gave rise to suspicions of oligarchic control, most notably among the city's middling ranks.

The three chapters which make up the last half of this thesis focus attention on specific events, and attempt to ground them in their proper historical context in order to better make sense of them. Each of these episodes was shaped by the ongoing processes of state formation and the extension of national markets. Chapter four focuses on the anti-Methodist rioting in Norwich over the course of 1751-2 and examines the underlying issues which mobilised the crowd against the Methodist fellowship. Although these incidents are frequently treated as instances of the persistence of Tory Jacobitism, closer reading of the content of events discloses a rather more nuanced state of affairs.

The crowd's actions certainly claimed a patriarchal imperative, defending the order of the family and community, but events also coincided with heightened national anxieties about social order, and specifically fears about the erosion of the family's intimate bonds. In part this pervasive sense of unsettlement was caused by the effects on people's lives in Norwich of the national economic changes of that time. Similar anxieties found voice in the disquiet expressed about the effects of print, particularly on the less reasoning part of mankind: the lower social orders and women. Indeed, print played a major role in the way that the anti-Methodist protests unfolded, with the to-and-fro of correspondence providing not rational dialogue but a paper war, stoking the flames of faction. Ultimately it was only the intervention of the city's magistrates which quietened the presses, for fear of wider unrest.

In chapter five I'll explore the economic events of 1752 in greater detail, and in particular the labour dispute between the master manufacturers and the journeymen woolcombers. The anti-Methodist rioting coincided with increased pressure placed on the labouring population by the merchant-manufacturers of the city. In an effort to improve productivity and reduce their production costs the city's textile interest had lobbied Parliament to secure legislation against embezzling yarn, yet they were as much motivated by their desire to redefine the nature of their working relationship with the journeymen artificers. The two sets of events are not readily separable, and situates the anxieties around domestic order within a broader economic and social context, in which the city's labouring poor were anxious to defend their customary working privileges, rooted in a parochial sense of locality and community.

Where the corporation's campaign of prosecutions led to the public whipping of malefactors the response of the populace was marked: levelling insults and threats at the constabulary, attempting to

disarm them and free the prisoners. The unrest prompted by the public punishment fuelled anxieties about the social order, and placed pressure on the city's governors, as much as the striking journeymen, to present their behaviour as serving the shared public interest. One of the notable features of these disputes was the willingness of the journeymen to publicise their cause in the press. The role of Timothy Keymer in publishing a statement by the woolcombers' combination provides an uncommon example of print employed to engage not only local opinion but a national audience.

The final chapter turns to the events surrounding the Norwich bread riots in 1766, and attempts to use these events to qualify Thompson's notion of the 'moral economy'. What becomes evident in the occurrence of unrest is that print once again played an important role, and prompted the outbreak of rioting. This supports Thompson and Rudé's insistence that such disturbances should not be considered spasmodic, but were deliberate and frequently coincided with other sources of political discontent. In particular it becomes evident that the paternalism of the moral economy was itself employed by middling critics of the corporation as a form of instrumental discourse.

Across all of these incidents there is a shared concern to bring out the underlying elements of bargaining and negotiation which constantly involved both rulers and ruled in the process of political governance. Such a contention accords with the influential treatment of class formation outlined by Thompson. Rather than appealing to a static sense of monolithic social structure he placed greater emphasis on class as relational and dynamic, as "a relationship, and not a thing". By treating social relations in this way he helped to restore a sense of volition and agency to his

historical subjects.¹⁸¹ Similarly the emphasis on popular politics helps to emphasise that these exchanges, although unequal and hierarchical, involved a degree of reciprocity, viewed neither from 'above' nor 'below', but responding to one another and shaping the other's response.

¹⁸¹ E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (London, 1991), p.10. See also Thompson, 'Eighteenth-century English society', pp.133-65

CHAPTER ONE – The Past as Custom and History

1. Outline

In the first half of the eighteenth-century, as it had been for the century before, the past remained for people an important source of authority. Their connection to the past was something people felt was tangible. This proximity, created by the notion of its continuity with the present, proved and justified the customs and institutions of the state, city and workplace. On its most fundamental level this sense of continuity was a source of stability underpinning the social order, as well as the legal and constitutional character of the nation. Past precedent was not only the source of the common law, but also determined the customs, identities, norms, habits and expectations which shaped people's everyday lives.

This chapter and the one that follows it are concerned with the continuity of these appeals to the past into the eighteenth-century, and in particular with how the print histories of Norwich, published in the first half of the century, represented and informed people's sense of the city's past. In this chapter I look at the practical process of producing the city's histories, culminating with the serialised publication in the 1740s of Francis Blomefield's history of Norwich.

I will demonstrate both the force of traditionalism and the continued relevance of people's deference to the past. Tradition is a problematic concept, evoking, as it does, nostalgic and hazily-defined ideas about the past, which frequently have little relation to historical fact. As a description of eighteenth-century society it is clearly inadequate to describe the complexities of the wide-ranging changes which shaped people's lives. However the historical reality

of these social, economic and political changes does not invalidate the fact that society was able to remain firmly traditional in its outlook, in which "the mould of the past continues to shape the present, or is supposed to."¹ The very vagueness of tradition ensured that it was flexible enough to encompass a range of differing, and sometimes contradictory, responses to the past.

New standards of scholarship, in place from the middle of the seventeenth-century, attempted to dispel the fuzziness of many people's way of thinking with a rigorously historical sense of the past. Publication and institutional networks extended participation in communication and knowledge production to greater numbers of correspondents, but resultantly faced the issue of how to determine their trustworthiness and credibility. The authority of appeals to a past vested in customary appeals to communal memory was challenged by the onset of these critical ideas and methods to a range of fields, from science and history to the law. The consequent discrediting of popular memory did not efface it, nor dispel people's traditionalism, but contributed to a more general anti-populist turn which deliberately distanced socially select, polite forms of discourse and knowledge from 'vulgar opinion'.

Such a tendency seemingly stood in contrast to the universalist claims of early Enlightenment thinking, which eschewed social considerations as having a bearing on knowledge production. But the way in which its epistemological thresholds were determined meant that public opinion was, if not formally proscribed, then less accessible to the majority of people on the basis of their diminished rationality. The forms of knowledge being created by the application of antiquarian methods to civil history were closely linked in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries to the legal and political

¹ E.J. Hobsbawm, 'The Social Function of the Past', Past & Present 55 (May 1972), p.5

definition of local authorities, and accompanied the ongoing processes of state formation. The legal philological methods they employed provided a standard for the more rigorous approach to the intensification and regularisation of municipal administration during the following century of urban development.

From the 1690s there was discernible a general suspicion of the expansion of the electorate beyond the propertied class of men, leading to efforts to reduce the size of the electorate.² Defining authority in rational-legal terms concentrated power in formal institutions and consequently weakened appeals to popular customary expectations as a means for the unenfranchised to claim to act on behalf of the public interest. Antiquarian discourse supported a stage of state-formation which was gradually redrawing and naturalising a formalised rational-legal model of the state, in which

special agencies were held to articulate 'true' public opinion, since what was otherwise articulated could be dismissed by defining it as a 'special pleading', 'public clamour' or 'ill informed shout'... In other words, this was an ethos shared within a political nation which, although somewhat enlarged since Tudor times, was... a conglomerate of different élite groupings.³

The formation of this stage of the state was dependent on the solidification of a conceptual framework which underpinned its stability and permanence. However such a shift could not simply be imposed from above, but needed to be legitimised in order to be recognised. It needed to naturalise the legal basis of its power in

² Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, p.33

³ Philip Corrigan, 'Towards a History of State Formation in Early Modern England', in Corrigan (ed.), Capitalism, State Formation and Marxist Theory (London, 1980), p.46

formal institutional channels of government, weakening the role played by diffuse informal appeals to custom and tradition, so that the boundaries between public and private, social and political were clearly defined: a process referred to Michel Foucault as *governmentality*.⁴

By controlling how the past was represented, one helped to determine how it was subsequently remembered and appealed to. If the eighteenth-century histories of Norwich were of varying quality, both in terms of their content and their standards of historicism, we might also consider that they demonstrated, if sometimes only fleetingly, how citizens perceived themselves. This is a point that will be explored in detail in the chapter that follows, but it helps to remind us that the historical writing of this period still maintained at least a small debt to the improving narratives of Renaissance humanism, and consequently the belief that a history is about more than facts alone, but reveals more fundamental truths about the civic community, considered as a polity.

2. The authority of the past

The pageantry which had accompanied Queen Elizabeth I's progress to Norwich in 1578 appealed explicitly to the city's mythical past, personified in the figure of King Gurgunt, its legendary founder. The rhetorical appeal to an ancient past celebrated the city's foundation and continuity, proclaiming that "To winne a Conquest, gets renowne and glorious name, To keep and use well, deserves eternal fame".⁵ The address publicly celebrated the city's vitality and prosperity. Its prominence and status had been proven and

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp.108-10

⁵ BG [Bernard Garter], *The Joyfull Receyving of the Queens most excellent Majestie* (London, 1578)

providentially dignified by the course of time. The words captured more than the mere momentum of tradition, but presented Norwich as persisting and flourishing, shaped by practical necessity and divine will.

God's interventions in the world were beyond man's limited rational faculties, influencing all things which "come to pass immutably and infallibly: yet by the same Providence he maketh them to fall out".⁶ Post-Reformation theology had deliberately downplayed the role of fortune or chance, in favour of divine providence, and such beliefs remained a commonly accepted fact of life. On the occasion of the public thanksgiving for the failed attempt on the life of King William III, the Bishop of Norwich, John Moore, delivered a royal sermon in which he treated the failure of the plot as an act of providence, expressly favouring protestant England and its monarch.⁷ More than fifty years later, the London earthquakes of 1750 and the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 alike were commonly explained in terms of divine intervention.⁸ As an idea providence was not easily dispelled, and much of its persuasive power drew from a more basic belief in the essential stability of the world.

Things' continuity and persistence was taken to be indicative of their fittedness and worthiness. On a fundamental level the sense of social, political and economic stability was built on an idea of settled order, proceeding unchanged from one age to the next. Change would only occur at the risk of upsetting and destabilising that order. In a memorial sermon delivered at Norwich Cathedral in 1734, and printed on the orders of the city's Court of Aldermen, the factionalism and civil strife of the preceding century was attributed to "the fatal Desire of Change, which in the Times of our Fathers

⁶ [Westminster Assembly], The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines (Edinburgh, 1647), p.10

⁷ John Moore, A Sermon Preach'd before the King at St James's (London, 1696)

⁸ Jane Shaw, Miracles in Enlightenment England (New Haven and London, 2006), pp.177-8

possessed by Turns almost all Parties”.⁹ The notion of change as constant and progressive was not universal, but can be thought of as a quintessentially modern belief. It has been argued that the early modern conception of the past resulted in a society which was in effect *pre-political*: meaning that it legitimated a normative sense of the *status quo* which remained, by and large, unquestioned.¹⁰

The body of tradition, which served to justify the quiescence and subordination of seventeenth-century politics, reflected a widespread belief “that the set of standards used to make judgements about society and varying positions within it stayed constant for almost all people at all times.”¹¹ Quite how quiescent early modern England actually was is open to question, but the fact remains that the past defined the terms by which social relations, as well as political and legal exchanges, were moderated. Opposing interests and positions were bound to appeal to the same persuasive force of precedent, and in consequence were commonly disputed at the level of legal controversy, arguing about differing interpretations of a shared past. It would be a mistake to oversimplify this fact, and assert that early modern society was merely traditional and unchanging, but there was certainly a commonly held suspicion of change and novelty.

After the mid-seventeenth-century this sense of the past was called into question. Keith Thomas has indicated that it was only in this period that the word ‘news’ acquired its modern sense, synchronous with developments in historical writing, archaeology and population demography which were informed by critical, interrogative approaches to the past.¹² The late seventeenth-century *Battle of the*

⁹ Samuel Shuckford, *A Sermon Preach’d at the Cathedral Church of Norwich* (Norwich, 1734), p.4

¹⁰ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp.504-5

¹¹ Peter Laslett, *The World we have lost* (London, 1973), p.183

¹² Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.510

Books dramatised disagreements regarding the superiority or inferiority of contemporary learning, and in effect about the nature of progress and change itself. In contrast to a prevailing early modern sense of time as cyclical, characterised by a persistent rise and fall, William Wotton enunciated the so-called *Moderns'* belief in progress, that "the world has gone on from Age to Age, improving; and consequently that it is at present much more knowing than it ever was since the earliest Times to which History can carry us."¹³

The capacity of the early Enlightenment to break with the past, in favour of an ideal of modern scientific rationality, is easily overstated. To have disregarded the foundations of the existing social order would have merely been perceived as levelling, and it was necessary to moderate how such critical approaches operated. Even as the authority for such appeals to the historical past were weakening, unable to claim the kind of uncontested unanimity they had done in the past, the decline of this mentality was uneven and protracted, persisting long into the eighteenth-century, and beyond.

The idea of custom is important to understanding early modern societies, and denotes both a body of localised customary law based on established usage, as well as the more vaguely defined system of cultural rules and expectations which helped things run regularly.¹⁴ In practice an ordered society relied less on the threat of punishment for breaking the law, than on rules of conduct, norms and taboos which were internalised and obeyed 'spontaneously'.¹⁵ Such social norms are considered mutually binding, and consequently impose expectations that they will be conformed with.¹⁶ The formalised system of written law developed gradually from such social norms, and in the eighteenth-century general

¹³ William Wotton, Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning (London, 1694), p.xii

¹⁴ Bob Bushaway, By Rite (London, 1982), p.7

¹⁵ B. Malinowski, Crime and Custom in Savage Society (London, 1926), p.13

¹⁶ Cristina Bicchieri, The Grammar of Society (Cambridge, 2006), p.42

custom continued to be considered part of the law, so that although not all norms were legally binding people ascribed them a certain authority.¹⁷

For any custom to be considered legally sound it had to have been in use beyond living memory, maintaining a continuity of undisputed right.¹⁸ Whilst it is not the case that all custom was *lex non scripta*, by its nature it was less reliant on codification than on demonstrating precedent in practical usage. Establishing a custom in law could mean referring to the custumal rolls, but it also needed to demonstrate continuity, so it often turned on the testimony of the oldest men of the parish to testify that it had, within the course of their lives, always been thus. Consequently a legal authority was afforded to memory, and provided a voice to commoners, legitimating inclusion in the determination of property relations. Memory existed as communal record, conferring a certain shared authority and veracity. The basis of custom in praxis meant that law shaded into manners and norms of conduct, which might in turn lay claim to a quasi-legal authority.

In rural areas customary practices formed an important part of the living economies of many people, where households' subsistence was in no small part reliant on the resources traditionally provided by access to common land, such as firewood, grazing for animals and the like. Although the commons of Mousehold Heath, in addition to providing a resort for the city's population on Sundays, also supplemented many poor people's earnings, in cities like Norwich working people were more fully integrated into an urban economy based on the exchange of cash and goods.¹⁹

¹⁷ Richard A. Posner, 'Social Norms and the Law: An Economic Approach', The American Economic Review 87:2 (May 1997), p.365

¹⁸ William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, vol.I (Chicago & London, 1979), pp.76-8

¹⁹ Neil MacMaster, 'The Battle for Mousehold Heath 1857-1884: "Popular Politics" and the Victorian Public Park', Past & Present 127 (May 1990), p.126

Urban custom differed from its rural counterpart as the existence of corporate charters provided it with a basis in written record, and allowed the privilege of grounding liberties in appeals to a formally codified constitution. Charters could be dated precisely, and there was a far greater emphasis on the appeal to written rather than oral sources.²⁰ However even the most detailed city charters did not specify and record all customs and usages. When the sheriffs serving Norwich in 1708 were not paid the expected expenses for their office, considered customary for the role, they appealed to the Court of Exchequer, with several alderman called on to testify as to the responsibilities and privileges which had usually accompanied the office.²¹ Witnesses to urban custom cases were more likely to be of middling or elite social status, with the meaner sort of people less prominent as deponents than in rural cases.²²

Customs could only claim legitimacy insofar as they were particular to a specific locale. However eighteenth-century commentators like Blackstone continued to represent England's common law as a species of custom, with the locality progressively devolving legal authority to uniform national laws, "each district mutually sacrificing some of its special usages, in order that the whole kingdom might enjoy the benefit of one uniform and universal system of laws."²³ Such a conception provided a narrative for the legal continuity of state formation which retained the validity and legitimacy of custom, and that

despite its irrational or at least prerational implications
(being dependent on social or judicial memory) it

²⁰ Andy Wood, *The Memory of the People* (Cambridge, 2013), pp.112-3

²¹ TNA, Exchequer Depositions taken by Commission, E 134/12 Anne/Mich 14, 4th Sep. 1713

²² Wood, *The Memory of the People*, pp.112-3

²³ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, vol.I, p.74

commanded respect even at the height of enthusiasm for rationalist methods.²⁴

Resistance to innovation was most clearly expressed by the seventeenth-century's common law tradition, which drew on the idea of law as a form of immemorial custom "refined and perfected by all the wisest men in former succession of ages,... [which] cannot without great hazard and danger be altered or changed."²⁵ This was more than an affirmation of the *status quo*, but made an important practical observation about qualifying the perfection and reason of the law. The common law of England was perceived as being less the product of statute, than of a gradual, cumulative process in which everything found its place and equilibrium, proceeding more by nature than by design. The fact of the law's continuity brought it into conformity with reason, "as a result not of philosophical reflexion but of accumulations and refinements of experience".²⁶ However, such reason was not always immediately obvious,

that whenever a standing rule of law, of which the reason perhaps could not be remembered or discerned, hath been wantonly broke in upon by statutes or new resolutions, the wisdom of the rule hath in the end appeared from the inconveniences that have followed this innovation... for though their reason be not obvious at first view, yet we owe such a deference to former times as not to suppose they acted wholly without consideration.²⁷

²⁴ Donald R. Kelley, 'Law', Burns and Goldie (ed.), The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700 (Cambridge, 1991), p.84

²⁵ Sir Edward Coke, The Fourth Part of the Reports (London, 1727), pp.iii-iv

²⁶ J.G.A. Pocock, The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law (Cambridge, 1957), p.35

²⁷ Blackstone, Commentaries, vol.I, p.70

Like providence, the rationale and character of the law was not then always easily divined, and necessitated a certain conservatism in its interpretation or reform. The eminent jurist Sir Matthew Hale maintained that the excellence of the common law resulted from its development ensuring it was "accommodated to the Frame of English Government, and to the Disposition of the English Nation, and such as by a long Experience and Use is... incorporated into their very Temperament".²⁸

The appeals of seventeenth-century common lawyers to the model of an ancient constitution, authorising their claims to certain liberties, was based on historically suspect claims, which progressively came under greater scrutiny with improving standards of scholarship. The very force of the claims to immutability - to the prehistoric past - were based on questionable foundations. However the problem arose of how the fact of wide-ranging and profound changes to society in the preceding centuries could be accommodated with claims to permanence and stability. Such appeals veiled change by representing them as consistent with the past, being "reinterpreted to sustain the illusion of a static society."²⁹ It was argued by the anthropologist Jack Goody that preliterate societies, lacking a written record of the past, were better able to effect that "homeostatic process of forgetting or transforming those parts of the tradition that cease to be either necessary or relevant."³⁰ The process of legal adaptation detailed by Maine functioned in a similar way, moulded to the practical needs of a changing society by employing legal fictions and equity to moderate the laws' usages. Such devices accommodated a latitude and flexibility to the letter of the law which provided an efficient

²⁸ Sir Matthew Hale, History of the Common Law of England (Chicago, 1971), p.30

²⁹ Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, p.505

³⁰ Jack Goody and Ian Watt, 'The Consequences of Literacy', Comparative Studies in Society and History 5:3 (Apr., 1963), p.344

means of simultaneously “transforming a system of laws and of concealing the transformation”.³¹

Somewhat counter-intuitively custom was able to function to a similar effect. Custom’s basis in constant renewal through continuous practice facilitated its subtle alteration over time, in response to shifting requirements.³² For a system of law to be based in practice meant that it remained adaptable to changing requirements by shifting usages. Traditions can become established as such in just two generations, and those societies characterised as traditional are unlikely to remain unchanged for much longer than that, with environmental and demographic factors, as well as exogenous pressures, necessitating adaptation to ensure their continuity and stability.³³ Such changes ordinarily spread unevenly across different strata of society, discreetly assimilating and taking the form of ‘new’ traditions, legitimated by their apparent consistency with the existing tradition.³⁴ In practice innovation thereby minimised conceptual and social dissonance, and contributed to the appearance of permanence and identity.

Implicitly the idea perpetuated by the common lawyers was based on a clear sense of collective identity, with the law evolving as an expression of the community itself.³⁵ Customs, virtually by definition, were non-litigious, originating from a general consensus based on “*de facto* conduct and repetition.”³⁶ Therefore such claims to unchanging consistency helped to naturalise customs as normative, and informed the sense of the common laws as a shared expression of the community. The appeal to the past engendered an

³¹ Henry Sumner Maine, Ancient Law (London, 1861), p.30

³² Wood, The Memory of the People, pp.141-3

³³ Raymond Williams, Keywords (London, 1976), p.269; Edward Shils, ‘Tradition’, Comparative Studies in Society and History 13:2 (April 1971), p.151

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.144-59

³⁵ Gerald J. Postema, Bentham and the Common Law Tradition (Oxford, 1989), pp.66-9

³⁶ Sir Carleton Kemp Allen, Law in the Making (Oxford, 1964), p.147

idea of common sense and corporative identity, based on a shared acceptance of received wisdom: "a belief which has been accepted by others in the past and by living elders who speak for the past in the present."³⁷ Common sense should here be understood not in the connotation of *good sense*, but akin to the Stoic's *sensus communis*, to which Shaftesbury appealed "to signify *Sense* of *Publick Weal*, and of the *Common Interest*; Love of the *Community* or *Society*".³⁸ As such, it is closest to that sense of 'common fame' which Leland trusted so highly, and signified the certainty found in common consensus of opinion.³⁹

Ceremonial spectacles, like that which greeted Elizabeth's progress into Norwich, appealed directly to the persuasive character of the past, presenting an historical, albeit legendary, image of the city which was capable of projecting a corporate civic identity. Victor Morgan, writing about the way in which the early modern city's civic rituals worked, identified two processes simultaneously at play. Ceremonial spectacles helped generate a shared memory and identity capable of integrating and incorporating a largely migrant working population into the city, and secondly, helped legitimate the city's corporate governors, by "reference to the progressive devolutions of royal authority through which the city had achieved its corporate existence."⁴⁰ The eighteenth-century histories of Norwich similarly presented an image of the city, conceived over time as a bounded and consistent entity able to integrate and bind the details of the past, but ultimately a product of the imagination,

³⁷ Shils, 'Tradition', p.129

³⁸ Shaftesbury, 'Sensus Communis', in Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times vol.I (Indianapolis, 2001), p.66

³⁹ Woolf, 'The "Common Voice"', p.30

⁴⁰ Victor Morgan, 'The Construction of Civic Memory in Early Modern Norwich', in Kwint, Breward and Aynsley (ed.), Material Memories (Oxford, 1999), p.192

as “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.”⁴¹

3. The past as history

In the latter half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century greater numbers of local topographical studies of counties and cities appeared in print. Although there had been several brief descriptions made of Norwich within more general views of the country, such as Camden’s *Britannia* and Henry Spelman’s contribution to Speed’s *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*, until the publication of the second volume of Francis Blomefield’s study of Norfolk, no comprehensive history of Norwich had been published.⁴² The most significant widely available historical record for the city was the appendix to Alexander Nevill’s *De furoribus Norfolciensium* or *Norfolk Furies*, first published in 1575, which added to a description of the city a chronicle for Norwich from its earliest days, and, if not thorough or exacting by later standards of historical scholarship, provided at least some degree of detail.

However the production of local histories was in large part still considered a more appropriate subject for *antiquarianism*, than for history proper. Whilst medieval chroniclers had provided a bare outline of events, and antiquarians described the disjointed remains of “the shipwreck of time”,⁴³ it was only history proper which transcended the empirical particulars to provide the grand narrative, capable of drawing more general lessons about civil society. Renaissance humanism held that only the narratives of

⁴¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991), p.6

⁴² William Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1610); John Speed, *The Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine* (London, 1612)

⁴³ Francis Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, in *The Major Works* (Oxford, 1995), p.179

perfect history were able to unify and explicate the causes of events, so that "he who relates Events without their Premisses and Circumstances deserves not the name of an Historian... without declaring the Nature of the Fabrick or teaching the Use of Parts."⁴⁴ According to this Ciceronian tendency history served primarily as a moral exemplar for the education of gentlemen, in preparation for them to govern. Henry Dodwell, in his preface to Degory Wheare's *Method and Order of Reading Histories*, claimed that its works were better suited "for the use of an active rather than a studious Life... to accomplish himself in Politicks, and the Art of war".⁴⁵ The Norwich City Library, a subscription library serving a number of the city's gentlemen, held a copy of Wheare's work, as well as copies of Camden, Speed and Neville.⁴⁶

However the humanists' critical project also raised doubts about the construction of historical knowledge. Writing in the 1570s, Philip Sidney criticised the tendency of historians to authorise their accounts and themselves "upon other histories, whose greatest authorities are built upon the notable foundation of hearsay".⁴⁷ The political and religious dissent which marked much of the early modern period eroded polite conventions of trust and fostered scepticism. In England seventeenth-century disputes over the nature of the constitution and the prerogative powers of the Crown further highlighted the varying partisan biases of historical interpretation and gave force to a critical re-engagement, capable of mediating and resolving dispute, adopting evidential criteria for what was committed to the page.⁴⁸ The emergence of an empirically

⁴⁴ Edmund Bolton, 'Hypercritica', in J.E. Springarn (ed.), Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century vol. 1 (Oxford, 1908), p.84

⁴⁵ Henry Dodwell, 'Invitation to Gentlemen', in Degory Wheare, The Method and Order of Reading both Civil and Ecclesiastical Histories (London, 1710)

⁴⁶ Clive Wilkins Jones (ed.), 'Norwich City Library 1608-1737', Norfolk Record Society LXXII (2008), pp.26-9

⁴⁷ Philip Sidney, A Defence of Poetry (Oxford, 1971), p.30

⁴⁸ Arnaldo Momigliano, Studies in Historiography (London, 1966), pp.10-1

based historicism distinct from earlier oral, folkloric traditions and medieval chronicles, was in large part a result of the application of the methods of legal philology to the subject.

Consequently as historians appealed more frequently to primary sources, rather than deferring exclusively to earlier authorities, they adopted some of the critical practices which had been pioneered by antiquarians, and ensured that such discursive literary distinctions seemed to grow increasingly porous. The interbleeding of history proper and antiquarianism sharpened awareness of striking the right balance between literary merit and scientific rigour. Contemporary writers cautioned against “the too studious Affectation of bare and sterile Antiquitie”,⁴⁹ which properly speaking constituted “not History; but Materials for it... if out of Them he can extract True history”.⁵⁰ Disagreements between *Ancients* and *Moderns*, as to the nature of the shared historical provinces they now occupied, retained some relevance in the eighteenth-century, both as a stylistic observation and as a reflection of contemporary opinions on historical progress. But these distinctions were perhaps less clear-cut in practice than later commentary has suggested, and this was particularly so on the scale of locale-centred topographical studies.⁵¹

Gentlemen were urged to consult the histories of their own country, which, if lacking the elegance of language possessed by the classical historians, would inculcate patriotic virtue, befitting the conduct and station of a gentleman.⁵² The Historiographer-Royal, Thomas Madox, writing at the beginning of the eighteenth-century, pointedly asked whether “the Political Constitution, Laws and Manners of Ancient Greece or Rome bear a nearer affinity or resemblance to

⁴⁹ John Selden, ‘Dedication to Cotton’, in The Historie of Tithes (1618)

⁵⁰ Thomas Madox, Firma Burgi (London, 1726), p.ix

⁵¹ Joseph M. Levine, ‘Ancients, Moderns and History’, in Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography (Cornell, 1987), pp.162-3

⁵² Wheare, The Method and Order, pp.132, 168-9

Those of Britain at this day, than the Ancient Constitution, Laws and Manners of Britain do to Those of Britain in the modern or present times?".⁵³

The model for the more detailed topographical antiquities which began to appear in print after the Restoration was Dugdale's *History of Warwickshire*. If the greater part of the book concerned itself with accounts of the pedigrees of the county's landed families, its manorial estates and ecclesiastical institutions, it also offered general insights which seemed more in keeping with history proper. Following its publication in 1656 one correspondent wrote to Dugdale that

by yo^r learned observations and p'tinent discourses throughout the whole worke you have improved all occasions for acquainting yo^r Reader with observables of all sorts, (worthy of publike notice) in matters whether of Church or State, not found there onely, but elsewhere; as well, I meane, in other Counties as yo^r owne... esteeming this extensive worke of yo^{rs} not a description more of Warwickshire, in particular, than of England in the generall.⁵⁴

The account of the city provided by Alexander Nevill formed the basis for what little was published about Norwich, rehashed in pamphlet histories, until well into the eighteenth-century. These were, in the main, largely opportunistic efforts by local booksellers, plagiarising and repackaging in brief digests material which had been published elsewhere.⁵⁵ While these inexpensive pamphlets

⁵³ Thomas Madox, *History and Antiquities of the Exchequer* (London, 1711), p.vii

⁵⁴ William Dugdale (ed. William Hamper), *Life, Diary and Correspondence* (London, 1827), p.309

⁵⁵ *A True Description of the City of Norwich* also printed octavo with the title *A Short History of the City of Norwich* (Norwich, 1706); *The History of the City of*

could be considered historiographically unimportant, they do, at the very least, provide a snapshot of the kind of ideas which were common currency at the time, as well as highlighting the continuity of popular interest in the city's historical past.

In this respect William Chase's 1728 *Compleat History* was fairly typical. Chase was not an historian or writer, but the printer and publisher of the *Norwich Mercury* newspaper. Building on the familiar features of Nevill's general description, he provided a brief account, drawn from both the mythological and historical past, of the origins of the city. The pamphlet described the foundations of the city's cathedral, hospitals and Bridewell, and added a chronicle of notable events. A geographical description of the city's walls, great wards and market prefaced an account of the growth of the corporation's civic government. As well as enumerating the city's officers, particular care was taken in describing the role of the citizen electorate, having "a like Power and Charter with the City of London", in appointing the mayor, sheriffs, aldermen and councillors, whose court functioned to "hear Complaints, and order such Things as belong to the Peace and Government of the City".⁵⁶

These cheap pamphlet publications made details of the city's past accessible to many more readers than the scholarly antiquarian tracts, which were ordinarily only available in manuscript or expensive printed editions. Once published however, these more detailed histories provided material which could be excerpted and absorbed piecemeal into the public consciousness via the popular press. Detailed civic records existed, held by the city's chamberlain,

Norwich (Norwich, 1718); A Compleat History of the famous City of Norwich (London, 1728); An Appendix to the Chronological History of the Famous City of Norwich (Norwich 1728); A Description of the Diocese of Norwich (London, 1735); The Records of Norwich (London, 1736-8); Thomas Eldridge, An Authentick History of the ancient City of Norwich (Norwich, 1738). A second edition of Chase's *Compleat History* was published in 1738, but bears the date of the earlier imprint.

⁵⁶ A Compleat History of the famous City of Norwich [1738], p.19

but they were not readily open to public scrutiny. The most significant of these was the *Liber Albus*, a single collection of municipal records modelled after the city of London's book of law, drawing together material from the city charters, records of writs and disputes, customs and proceedings of the city courts. The *Liber Albus* emerged from a period of protracted dispute and litigation with the Crown in the early fifteenth-century, and was created to clarify legal precedent, liberties and customs, to define the city's foundation and constitution.⁵⁷

It has been noted by Robert Tittler that a similarly litigious period for Great Yarmouth in the sixteenth-century, when it was forced with alarming regularity to defend its jurisdiction regarding the herring fishery, provided the catalyst for it to produce its own civic history.⁵⁸ History in these cases functioned not as literary narrative, written merely for entertainment or antiquarian curiosity, but possessed a more immediately practical purpose by defining the historical precedents for its liberties and privileges. The production of many early civic histories was prompted by the city corporations themselves, and has been tied to promoting and developing their urban identities and prestige. Norwich's governors demonstrated little official interest in such a project however, and it fell instead to the efforts and enthusiasm of private men to initiate.⁵⁹

For a conservative-minded antiquarian like Thomas Hearne, histories still principally served as a benefit "to our young Gentry and Nobility".⁶⁰ Yet in the eighteenth-century the explosion of print

⁵⁷ Rev. William Hudson and John Cottingham Tingey (ed.), The Records of the City of Norwich, vol.1 (Norwich, 1906), p.lxxix

⁵⁸ Robert Tittler, Townpeople and Nation (Stanford, 2001), pp.121-39

⁵⁹ Rosemary Sweet, 'Provincial Culture and Urban Histories in England and Ireland', in Borsay and Proudfoot (ed.), Provincial Towns in Early Modern England and Ireland (Oxford, 2002), p.230; Norf. RO, MC 431/7,734X7, Statement by Benjamin Mackerell, 1738

⁶⁰ Thomas Hearne, 'Preface' to Hearne (ed.), A Collection of Curious Discourses Written by Eminent Antiquaries (Oxford, 1720), p.xxxvii. Hearne did concede that

and its increased accessibility ensured that histories were reaching a far wider audience. Hearne's published writings would ironically help to usher in a new age of historical writing, providing standards for scholarly historicism and the pedagogical resources to open up antiquarian research to a growing literate middle class, where in bygone days it had been largely the preserve of the gentry and scholars. It is telling that a significant number of eighteenth-century antiquarians practised law or were professional men occupying civic offices, rather than members of the landowning classes or mercantile elite.⁶¹ The record of membership for one of the foremost antiquarian societies of the period confirms Rosemary Sweet's findings, that "generally they were professional persons: of these the lawyers predominated".⁶²

4. Antiquarian networks and writing history

Pivotal to the endeavours of the early eighteenth-century antiquarians of Norwich and Norfolk was Peter Le Neve, and the vast collection of documents he amassed through the antiquarian networks he nurtured and his work as a herald of the Royal College of Arms. Under Queen Anne the emphasis on the heralds' offices was "to preserve the honor of the nobility and gentry, from persons of meaner rank intruding into their families, and unjustly assuming their arms".⁶³ The College's role was in some measure anachronistic, serving to preserve a social hierarchy of landed families, although in actuality it was a less politically partisan

as well as serving to educate the ruling classes, history might also prove useful "to persons of greater maturity".

⁶¹ Rosemary Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories* (Oxford, 1997); Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries* (London, 2004), pp.31-79

⁶² Society of Antiquaries of London, Mark Noble, MS Lives of the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, 1818

⁶³ Rev. Mark Noble, *A History of the College of Arms* (London, 1804), p.329

institution than this would seem to imply, accommodating the free-thinking, non-conformist Le Neve.⁶⁴ Although the work of a herald in proving individuals' armorial pedigree was primarily genealogical and heraldic, it provided access to historical documents for pursuing other fields of enquiry. In the preceding century both Camden and Dugdale had been heralds, as had Gregory King, whose *Natural and Political Observations* provided one of the earliest detailed demographic accounts of the nation.⁶⁵

Le Neve was one of a select group of like-minded men, active in the emergent Republic of Letters, who from at least 1707 deliberated to regularly assemble at several London coffee-houses and taverns, with the aim of discussing and sharing in the "Antiquities and History of Great Britain".⁶⁶ Although initially a small informal gathering, the antiquarians' manner and orders of association looked to the Royal Society as their model. Le Neve was made chairman by his fellows, and continued in this role up until they became the Society of Antiquaries of London in 1717, when he was appointed its first president.

Although a Londoner Le Neve's family originally came from Norfolk, and his brother held an estate at Witchingham, close to Norwich. He had set upon the design to produce his own topographic history of Norfolk, and used his influence and connections to collect any materials which would bolster his private holdings to this end. After the death of Sir Symonds D'Ewes his antiquarian library was sold off, to be incorporated into the Harleian manuscript collections, but

⁶⁴ Thomas Woodcock, 'Le Neve, Peter (1661 -1729)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn, May 2009; Alexander Pope, Literary Correspondence vol.II (London, 1735), pp.115-27; Letters Written by Eminent Persons vol.II pt.I (London, 1813), pp.103-4

⁶⁵ Gregory King, 'Autobiography' in John A. Taylor, British Empiricism and Early Political Economy (Westport, 2005), p.97

⁶⁶ 'Humphrey Wanley's minutes for Friday 12th December 1707', in Joan Evans, History of the Society of Antiquaries (Oxford, 1956), p.36

not before Le Neve had been granted access to make copies.⁶⁷ Similar financial difficulties for the Earl of Yarmouth led him to raise money by selling a portion of his family's historic papers to Le Neve, including the late medieval personal correspondence later published as the *Paston Letters*.⁶⁸

Le Neve's brother cautioned him against undertaking to write the history of the county himself:

[I]t is impossible for any man to goe thro' with it, specially by the method you take... and till you take the paines to visit [th]e several places and view Evidences Court Books &c you will be lead in to errors and deceive [th]e Readers, and if I am not grossly mistaken; it is not to be effected in the Age of one man.⁶⁹

Within the antiquarian circles he moved in Le Neve's intent to compile a general history of Norfolk was well-known, but word spread further and provided the basis for gentlemen, whose interests and reputations were more parochial, to offer their assistance. A Mr Barrett of Griston wrote to him, "not only in imparting to you what I have already collected, but also of what else I can gather upon further search & inquiry", offering descriptions and drawings of churches within his locale.⁷⁰ After his brother's death in 1711 Le Neve took possession of the Witchingham estate, although his position and social activities required that the greater part of his life was spent in London.

⁶⁷ J.M. Blatchly, 'D'Ewes, Sir Simonds, first baronet (1602 -1650)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn, Jan 2008; John Nichols, Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century vol.IV (London, 1822), p.84

⁶⁸ Norman Davis, 'Introduction', in Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century pt. I (Oxford, 2004), p.xxv

⁶⁹ Norf. RO, MC 1/97, Letter from Oliver Le Neve to Peter Le Neve, 22nd Oct. 1694

⁷⁰ Norf. RO, MC 1/63-4,386x5, Letters from Mr Barrett of Griston to Peter Le Neve

Le Neve had access to metropolitan and national networks of antiquarian contacts, as well as the authority afforded his reputation and office. This status and influence attracted a small circle of local men dedicated to antiquarian pursuits, several of whom Le Neve recommended for membership of the Society of Antiquaries of London.⁷¹ Consequently the collection made by Le Neve became more than a reference source for the Norfolk antiquarians to draw on, but grew as it, in turn, incorporated transcripts of their own research.

More than any other of Le Neve's associates, John Kirkpatrick laid the groundwork for a detailed topographical history of Norwich. Kirkpatrick had served his apprenticeship as a linen-draper, and in 1711 took the freedom of the city in that trade. Shortly afterwards he entered the employ of John Custance, a successful linen merchant, and subsequently became his business partner. Custance was later made an alderman of the city, and during his term of mayoralty he appointed Kirkpatrick treasurer of the Great Hospital. Kirkpatrick himself served as a common councillor for the city, and married into one of the best connected mercantile families.⁷² Consequently he was in a privileged position to obtain access to the records of its civic institutions and offices, and to gain insight into the day-to-day process of the city's government and administration.

An early attempt at penning an historical chronicle for the city, its details in large part culled from Camden, Fuller's *Worthies* and Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, demonstrated his ambition. The rudimentary structure of the chronicle was however quite insufficient to accommodate the volume and range of the

⁷¹ These men included Tanner, John Kirkpatrick, Thomas Martin and Thornhaugh Gurdon. Society of Antiquaries of London, Mark Noble, *MS Lives of the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries*, 1818

⁷² Frederic Johnson, 'John Kirkpatrick, Antiquary', *Norfolk Archaeology* 23 (1929), pp.285-304; Dawson Turner, 'Preface' to John Kirkpatrick, *History of the Religious Orders* (Norwich, 1845), pp.v-xv; David Stoker, 'John Kirkpatrick', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn.

documentary sources he later gained access to.⁷³ In addition to a wealth of antiquarian notes concerning arms, pedigrees and church inscriptions, his manuscripts contained transcriptions from the city's corporate records. Included in these papers were copies of the city assembly's court books and legal opinions on the corporation's jurisdictions and customs, citing historical precedents which clarified the powers and responsibilities of its offices, and provided the means to piece together an historical account of the city's institutions and citizen populace.⁷⁴ In the course of his work duplicates of the papers he transcribed from the corporation's records were passed onto Le Neve, who in return provided Kirkpatrick with any documents he could which specifically related to Norwich, in order that copies could be made.⁷⁵ This circulation and augmentation of manuscript sources between antiquarian associates further supports evidence of the continued vitality of forms of limited scribal publication well into the eighteenth-century.⁷⁶

Kirkpatrick got as far as composing an order and index for the whole work, its headings referring back to the scattered texts he'd written for inclusion, as well as numerous citations to manuscripts and books, recorded on hundreds of small slips of paper.⁷⁷ However his history of the city never reached completion, although sections circulated in manuscript form and were later published in the nineteenth-century as the *History of Religious Houses and Religious Orders in Norwich*, the *Notes concerning Norwich Castle*, and *The*

⁷³ Norf. RO, MC 500/18,761X7, John Kirkpatrick, *Annals of Norwich*

⁷⁴ Norf. RO, COL 13/98, *Description of the form of the city of Norwich*; Norf. RO, BOL 4/13, *Notes on the jurisdiction of the city in the Castle Ditches and Fee*; Norf. RO, NCR Case 21f/59, *Assembly Minutes - Extracts*

⁷⁵ Francis Blomefield, *Correspondence* (Norwich, 1992), p.235

⁷⁶ Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore and London, 1999), p.121

⁷⁷ Norf. RO, BOL 4/5,741x,22a-b, John Kirkpatrick, *Index of contents*

Streets and Lanes of the City of Norwich.⁷⁸ With his premature death in 1728 his manuscripts were left to his brother Thomas, with the intention it be given "to the Mayors, Sheriffs, &c... for their use and service on occasion, as that some citizen hereafter, being a skilful antiquary, may from the same have an opportunity of completing and publishing the said history".⁷⁹

When Le Neve died the following year one of his executors, a fellow Norfolk antiquarian, provided Francis Blomefield with full access to the raw materials required for him to begin the composition of the county's history. At this time, the most complete attempt to produce a county history had been the *Magna Britannia Antiqua et Nova*, which built on, and significantly enlarged, the sixth edition of Camden's *Britannia*, adding much new detail.⁸⁰ However the emphasis of the chapter was very much on the county rather than the city, for which little more than a very general overview was provided, more in the style of Nevill's familiar description. Thornhaugh Gurdon's 1728 history of Norwich Castle provided more detail, but he limited his account to the castle and scarcely mentioned the post-medieval history of the city. Despite a more critical antiquarian style than the popular histories of the time, it was little more than a pamphlet, numbering just forty pages.⁸¹

In 1741 Blomefield published the first instalment of his volume on Norwich, with subsequent instalments appearing in print over the next four years. In its divisions the work employed a broadly similar structure to other antiquarian studies, not attempting to impose a linear narrative. The first part of the work provided a chronicle detailing events in the city's history, from its first foundation up to

⁷⁸ Kirkpatrick *History of the Religious Orders*; John Kirkpatrick, *The Streets and Lanes of the City of Norwich* (Norwich, 1889)

⁷⁹ Frederic Johnson, 'John Kirkpatrick, Antiquary', pp.292-3

⁸⁰ *Magna Britannia Antiqua et Nova vol.III* (London, 1738), pp.251-457

⁸¹ Thornhaugh Gurdon, *An essay on the antiquity of the Castel of Norwich* (Norwich, 1728)

the present, with the remainder surveying the cathedral and religious houses, and describing the city's parishes and hamlets. Where it parted company from previous efforts at writing Norwich's history was in the sheer volume of material that it managed to marshal, with extensive footnotes detailing the documentary sources and offering commentary over its nine hundred pages.

5. History and credibility

In the opening pages of his volume on Norwich Blomefield was at pains to protest that

So many are the fables, and so various the accounts that we have, of the origin of this city, that it would be trouble to no purpose, to recount them all... I shall rather choose to give such an account of it as is most consonant to reason, and agreeable to truth, as far as is evident from such records as we have left us.⁸²

Camden's account of Norwich, first published in 1586, mentioned in passing the popular myths of the foundation of the city by Caesar or by Guiteline the Briton, but he gave them little quarter, as fables originating with those "more hasty to beleeve all than weigh matters with sound judgement."⁸³ These accounts of the legendary origins of the city were reiterated freely by the pamphlet histories, but the antiquarian accounts of Blomefield and Thornhaugh Gurdon took greater care to disavow such sources. By the beginning of the eighteenth-century topographical histories consciously distanced themselves from folklore and the popular oral sources of "vulgar

⁸² Blomefield, *Norwich*, p.1

⁸³ Camden, *Britannia*, p.474

tradition”, denigrating them as intrinsically unreliable: mere “Brats of prolifick Imagination, not worthy of Confutation.”⁸⁴ By doing so they were also stressing topographical histories’ legitimacy as a medium for historical knowledge. The histories adopted a position, distinct from vernacular tradition, rooted in methodological and historiographical standards which in the later seventeenth-century became dominant, and to a significant extent prefigured modern historical practice.

Chorographical accounts, from Leland’s *Itinerary* onwards, had drawn to some degree on oral sources and traditions, but by the beginning of the eighteenth-century the testimony of popular memory had been deemed inaccurate and vague, and consequently were ill-suited to the more critical treatment of sources required by history or scientific enquiry.⁸⁵ Oral reports came to be used only sparingly as they were generally considered inferior to the written record due to the imperfections of memory, particularly when recounted indirectly.⁸⁶ However an author’s dependence on something other than their own first-hand experience meant that the truth or falsity of a report was ultimately reliant on existing models for testing credibility, applying legal models of probability and certainty to ascertain such statements of fact. That necessitated, said Robert Boyle, that such cases “we must take upon the credit of others.”⁸⁷ George Hooper, later Bishop of St Asaph, clarified that the credibility of someone’s testimony was dependent both on their personal *Fidelity*, or their intent to recount

⁸⁴ Gurdon, Antiquity of the Castel of Norwich

⁸⁵ Daniel Woolf, The Social Circulation of the Past (Oxford, 2003), pp.362-82

⁸⁶ [George Hooper], ‘A Calculation of the Credibility of Human Testimony’, Philosophical Transactions 21 (1699), pp.361-2

⁸⁷ Robert Boyle, ‘The Christian Virtuoso’, in Philosophical Works vol.II (London, 1725), p.253

it truthfully and impartially, and on their cognitive ability to perceive and recall phenomena accurately.⁸⁸

Defoe's coverage of the Great Storm of 1703 drew together numerous personal accounts sent to him, and conscious of defending his own authorial credibility in recounting their testimony, he qualified his sources and vouched "to the Reputation of the Relators, tho' not to the particulars of the Story."⁸⁹ Where he deferred to another's report Defoe took care to qualify that they were personally trustworthy, citing the testimony of the "very honest, plain and observing Persons, to whom entire Credit may be given."⁹⁰ The credibility invested in an individual or institution rested on their credit, that is, of their reputation or honour.⁹¹

Craig Muldrew has usefully developed this conception of credit, in which people's reputation for reliability "circulated by word of mouth through the community".⁹² However, by exceeding the relative intimacy of largely localised networks of proximal acquaintance, the model faltered. If a witness was personally unfamiliar to the author, whose job it was to determine their credibility, practical necessity required they have some means of making a judgement. In accounting for the authority of his deponents Defoe most frequently related correspondents' credit to their reputation, which largely reflected their social position or office. Thus he spoke of one witness "being a Gentleman whose Credit we cannot dispute, in acknowledgement to his Civility", or elsewhere justified an account as being attested to by the "principal Inhabitants" of the parish.⁹³ In attempting to determine the trustworthiness of testimony the use of

⁸⁸ [Hooper], 'Credibility of Human Testimony', p.359

⁸⁹ Daniel Defoe, *The Storm* (London, 2003), p.162

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.75

⁹¹ Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty* (Princeton, 1983), pp.21-2

⁹² Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation* (Basingstoke, 1998), p.156

⁹³ Defoe, *The Storm*, pp.65-6

credit assumed a social complexion, effecting the way in which both perceptual competence and trustworthiness were considered.⁹⁴

In legal cases even the meanest sort of people were still able to act as deponents, with their testimony considered capable of expressing truth. But that is not to say that all reports were considered to carry equal weight. Sir Matthew Hale specified that juries should accord more or less credit in relation to the "Quality, Carriage, Age, Condition, Education, and Place of Commorance of Witnesses".⁹⁵ Susan Dwyer Amussen, examining the evidence of seventeenth-century Norfolk, demonstrated that the testimonies of the labouring poor in legal cases were in general considered less reliable than those of someone of a superior social standing, with their personal credit largely determined in accordance with their station in life.⁹⁶

The Royal Society's proselytiser, Thomas Sprat, cautioned against entrusting observations to hirelings, who were less likely to possess the requisite education and judgement to discriminate what was relevant. Furthermore their position of economic dependency meant that they might "take care to bring in such collections as might seem to agree with the Opinions and Principles of their Masters, however they did with Nature itself."⁹⁷ If the Royal Society's rhetoric for the new learning boasted it was open to anyone, the necessity, identified by Boyle, of striking a balance between empiricist scepticism and the essentially polite conventions of trust, meant that it continued to defer to established social relations in determining the legitimacy of what was said.⁹⁸ However Amussen has suggested that, far from being a universally accepted term of reference, credit was principally employed as a concept of the

⁹⁴ Steven Shapin, A Social History of Truth (Chicago, 1994), p.75

⁹⁵ Hale, History of the Common Law, p.164

⁹⁶ Susan Dwyer Amussen, An Ordered Society (New York, 1988), pp.152-3

⁹⁷ Thomas Sprat, History of the Royal Society of London (London, 1667), p.84

⁹⁸ Shapiro, Probability and Certainty, p.14

governing classes, and “the equation of wealth with moral worth” was not perhaps shared by the poor themselves.⁹⁹

Daniel Woolf identified the progressive scepticism towards the validity of popular and oral accounts over the course of the seventeenth-century as socially driven, and as linked to anxieties about social order and a bifurcation of popular and elite forms of culture.¹⁰⁰ The authority of popular oral accounts would eventually come to be largely relegated to the field of *folklore*, distinct from any superior form of historical knowledge.¹⁰¹ Sir Thomas Browne’s *Repertorium* committed to record the memorials of Norwich Cathedral, which had been destroyed in the iconoclasm of the 1640s, and were remembered by “one of the clerks, above eighty years old, and... one of the choir, who lived eighty-nine years.. [and] told me he was a chorister in the reign of Queen Elizabeth”.¹⁰² It was increasingly unusual, even for late seventeenth-century topographical studies, to rely so explicitly on popular memory and oral tradition in this way and its posthumous publication was a matter of concern for his contemporaries. Archbishop Tenison emphasised that the account had only been intended for private use and never publication, its sources failing to offer “matter equal to the skill of the Antiquary”.¹⁰³ Browne’s nominal authorship afforded it a credibility it did not deserve, lacking the methodical thoroughness of textual documentary sources.

Antiquarian historiography demanded material, textual precedents, even where the original of such textual accounts was the spoken report of memory. Accordingly Francis Blomefield was cautious in

⁹⁹ Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, p.155

¹⁰⁰ Burke, *Popular Culture*, pp.272-5

¹⁰¹ Woolf, ‘The “Common Voice”’, pp.47-8

¹⁰² Sir Thomas Browne, ‘Repertorium’, in *Posthumous Works* (London, 1712), pp.1-2

¹⁰³ Simon Wilkin, ‘Preface’, in Sir Thomas Browne *Works vol. IV* (London, 1835), pp.ix-xi; Thomas Brown[e], *Certain Miscellany Tracts* (London, 1684), pp.ii-iii

his work to vouchsafe the reliability and authority of his sources, marking them in his extensive footnotes.

6. Social conditions for representing the past

In part the emphasis of these new standards was reflective of a more deeply rooted set of mentalities which informed the cultural politics of the time. As a source of authority, capable of defining the constitution of the public, the historical representation of the past was not open to be written by just anyone, so in practice what determined who was able to write history? Obviously few possessed the level of literacy, the financial means and the inclination to write and publish, but it also required sufficient authority to be able to legitimate public statements of fact. The commitment, demanded by the new learning, to reason and factual objectivity related it not just to a required standard of education, inculcating critical faculties of reasoning, but to virtues of civility, impartiality and independence which were commonly perceived as both socially specific, as well as gendered.¹⁰⁴

Attempts at antiquarian learning by someone of a lesser social station could be easily disregarded as “medling in Things beyond his Sphere”, perpetuating its status as the preserve of their superiors.¹⁰⁵ Even an antiquarian as prominent as Thomas Hearne found his social status being turned against him. As a non-Juror, Jacobite and contrarian he elicited frequent personal criticism, but it is telling that the fact of his modest origins was considered by contemporaries as undermining his reputation.¹⁰⁶ Impartiality was

¹⁰⁴ Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp.34-5

¹⁰⁵ William Nicholson, *The English Historical Library* (London, 1696), p.13; Sweet, *Antiquaries*, p.57

¹⁰⁶ D.C. Douglas, *English Scholars* (London, 1943), pp. 226-48

routinely considered to be compromised by material dependence, and there were suspicions of self-interestedness and mendacity by those in a position of dependence or servitude. Although mercantile credit networks were dependent on trust and good reputation, such doubts could also extend to the commercial interest in general, as their commitment to economic profit was frequently considered to compromise their impartiality.¹⁰⁷ The credibility of the early news reports of the previous century had been called into question by serving commercial, rather than sociable, ends, in part due to such concerns.¹⁰⁸ Neither did these suspicions easily abate, with eighteenth-century fears about stock-jobbers “continually hatching and spreading false Accounts of the State of Affairs Abroad, in order to intimidate the People, and run down the Stocks”.¹⁰⁹

The rational judgement of the lower orders was variously dismissed as less credible, and similarly many contemporary writers underlined the natural inferiority of women. George Hickes’ translation of Fenelon’s work on the education of daughters claimed that women possessed

a weaker and more inquisitive Temper than Men, so it is not proper to engage them in Studies that may turn their Brains: as it is not their business either to govern the State, or to make War, or to enter into the Ministry of Sacred things; so they do need not be instructed in some sorts of Sciences which apertain to Politicks, the Military Art, Law, Philosophy, and Divinity.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Shapin, *A Social History of Truth*, pp.93-5

¹⁰⁸ David Randall, *Credibility in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Military News* (London, 2008), pp.84-5

¹⁰⁹ *NG*, 21st May 1726

¹¹⁰ [François Fénelon], *Instructions for the Education of a Daughter* (London, 1707), p.3

Although women were unable to claim either full legal recognition or citizenship, their formal exclusion from participating in public affairs was not total. In the 1640s and 1650s many women had been actively involved in petitioning parliament, and others made their way into print amongst the period's swell of published writings.¹¹¹ However there was also a general expectation about women's conduct, carried over from the seventeenth-century into the next. It was still widely accepted that women should demonstrate a retiring disposition, and that they primarily concern themselves with a private, domestic role.¹¹² In spite of such resistance, more women continued to appear in print as the eighteenth-century progressed, although they continued to face practical impediments raised in relation to their authorship compromising rules of modesty. Such questions need not have precluded women from writing, but had to be negotiated by employing various strategies consistent with prevailing customary expectations about their sex. Anne Dutton, writing in 1743, was obliged to justify her actions as both proper and in accordance with scriptural prohibitions against women preaching.

For tho' what is printed is published to the World, and the Instruction given, is in this regard *Publick*... Yet it is *Private* with respect to the *Church*... the Teaching, or Instruction thereby given is *private*: and of no other Consideration than that of Writing a private Letter to a Friend, or having a private *Conference* with him for his Edification... communicating ones Mind in Print, is as *private*, with

¹¹¹ Patricia Crawford, 'Women's published writings 1600-1700' in Mary Prior (ed.) Women in English Society (London, 1991), pp.213-4

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.214

respect to particular *Persons*, as if one did it particularly unto every one *by himself* in ones *own House*.¹¹³

In spite of Enlightenment rhetoric social distinctions were relevant in effectively limiting full participation from articulating public forms of knowledge. However in an age characterised by social mobility such distinctions were often difficult to pin down in practice, so we have to be cautious about overstating the definition of credibility in relation to clearly defined social thresholds. Whilst social status and expectations of genteel conduct played some role in judging credibility, social distinctions had become blurred, with swathes of the professional and commercial classes now laying claim to the status of 'gentlemen'.¹¹⁴

It has already been seen that the antiquarian historians were overwhelmingly likely to be members of the legal profession, many of whom would have been considered of little more than 'middling' status. As such, they did not easily conform to an honour-centred model of the noble classes, yet they were evidently able to command sufficient authority for their work to be treated seriously and command the status of undisputed fact. This might in some cases be attributed to the patronage of societies, corporations, or of noblemen, but equally it can be seen that they were, in their own right, capable of commanding sufficient credit to write history. Consequently, although more open than Steven Shapin has maintained,¹¹⁵ many authors' status was also unstable and prompted them to forms of self-presentation which demonstrated

¹¹³ A.D. [Anne Dutton], 'A Letter To such of the Servants of Christ, who may have any Scruple about the Lawfulness of PRINTING any Thing written by a Woman, 1743', in Vivien Jones (ed.), Women in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1990), pp.159-9

¹¹⁴ Nicholson, The English Historical Library, p.13; Sweet, Antiquaries, p.57

¹¹⁵ Shapin, A Social History of Truth, pp.66-74

that they fulfilled the requisite virtues to qualify them as credible authorities.

Considered in this light Francis Blomefield's protestations of his financial independence can be seen as stressing his own gentility and emphasising his appropriateness, and indeed authority, for the task of writing history. He underlined the fact, "that I don't print (I thank God for it) for my bread, having a comfortable subsistence independent of all men and therefore fear no loss of reputation."¹¹⁶ By undertaking its printing and publication himself he felt that he was bypassing both the wiles of some printers who would not do the job to the standard he expected, but also that his "dependence is upon no man living one more than another and therefore partiality in me would be to no purpose."¹¹⁷ The publishers of the pamphlet histories did not face quite the same pressures. Their work was unlikely to be treated seriously by a learned audience, but this is not to say that its readership, for many of whom credibility was less closely identified with social reputation, did not treat its contents as factual.

In several places Blomefield's history drew on a chronicle which had been written at the beginning of the century by Joseph Nobs, the parish clerk for St Gregory's in Norwich. This is most prominent in his account of the Norwich mint, where Blomefield used figures originally calculated by Nobs.¹¹⁸ Nobs occupied a relatively lowly position in the civic community, but taught Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and could count the eminent Newtonian Samuel Clarke among his former students.¹¹⁹ Building on the chronicle appended to the *Norfolk Furies*, Nobs began augmenting it by adding entries from documentary accounts, as well as more recent events from his

¹¹⁶ Blomefield, *Correspondence*, p.136

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.180

¹¹⁸ *Notes and Queries* 3:84 (7 June 1851), pp.447-8

¹¹⁹ Norf. RO, MS 453, T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of the City of Norwich; William Massey, *Origin and Progress of Letters* (London, 1763), p.118

personal experience as a native of the city. A number of the narrative details he described for the later seventeenth-century are immediately recognisable in Blomefield's account of that period.

His chronicle had been circulating for a number of years in manuscript form, with Kirkpatrick drawing heavily on its account of events for the late seventeenth-century in his unpublished annals of the city, yet Nobs is scarcely referenced in Blomefield's publication, whilst other manuscripts and chronicles receive scrupulous citation and footnotes.¹²⁰ This was unlikely to be a matter of plagiarism, as the details of Nobs' account were well-known locally. A copy had been sent to Alderman Peter Fromanteel and was kept updated by the city's coroner up to the 1750s.¹²¹ Rather, the style of his chronicle and Nob's modest status did not afford him sufficient credit for the work to be cited as a credible authority. The self-consciousness of Blomefield's own social status in producing the history meant that he would have been acutely sensitive to the need to maintain his own credibility and the authority of his sources.

Given the stylistic content and presentation of the antiquarian histories they did not provide an obvious medium for transmitting political ideas, and certainly their methodological ambivalence to the rhetoric of narrative meant that they rarely attempted to do so explicitly. The topographical studies of Norwich presented their history of the city as largely corporate affairs, tracing its development as a legal and political entity through its castle, city walls, marketplace, ecclesiastical bodies and charitable foundations. In part this was of necessity, as these institutional bodies tended to produce paper trails which had remained sufficiently intact to provide some idea of continuity, as well as also being conscious of

¹²⁰ Norf. RO, MC 500/18,761X7, John Kirkpatrick, Annals of Norwich; Blomefield, Norwich

¹²¹ Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of the City of Norwich

the traditional focus of antiquarian study. The style of the histories consequently placed less emphasis on narrative, than on details of the growth and development of its core institutions, in which the stability of the city as a whole emerged progressively from its foundations.

The civic histories of Norwich emerged from the strength of a shared civic tradition. It has been shown that where those sort of traditions were weaker or less developed then they consequently were less likely, and quite simply less able, to write their own histories. Rosemary Sweet has indicated that this was the case for much of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Ireland, where civic traditions and incorporation were far less developed and where cities had been politically dominated by feudal magnates to a much greater extent than in England.¹²² In the case of Norwich, although the corporation did little to formally encourage its own history, it was the effort and connections of John Kirkpatrick which provided Francis Blomefield with the necessary material to write his history of the city. However the popular pamphlet histories had their own contribution to make, which if only occasionally useful, and possessing little or none of the historical integrity that Blomefield's account possessed then they helped render a picture of the city which would have been recognisable, and of interest, to its inhabitants at the time.

The histories of Norwich never approached the kind of narrative logic of the perfect histories lauded by the Renaissance humanists, but this is not to say that they were not yet capable of conveying persuasive normative ideas about governance. Even the more modest pamphlet histories, which were usually only brief surveys possessing little sense of commentary or interpretation, were still capable of expressing flashes of something more forceful about

¹²² Sweet, 'Provincial Culture and Urban Histories', pp.230-1

their civic society. Once the details of the civic histories made their way into print they could no longer be treated as exclusive knowledge, as they had previously, and control over the reception and iteration of their content was delimited.¹²³

¹²³ Harold Love, Scribal Publication in Seventeenth Century England (Oxford, 1993), pp.183-4

CHAPTER TWO – The Histories of Norwich

1. Outline

In the previous chapter we looked at the process of creating the early eighteenth-century histories of Norwich, and examined the continued relevance of the past as a source of ideas about how people perceived the world that they lived in. Established laws, customs, traditions and manners helped to define their identities and structure their social and economic relationships. These ideas were memorialised in different ways, forming the basis of a vernacular traditionalism which, whilst it continued to retain much of its force amongst a section of the population, was also weakened by rationalist methods and improved historical scholarship. However popular print and the changes to public discourse that accompanied it also made these representations of the past more readily accessible to a broad reading public.

The topographical histories which began to appear in the last half of the seventeenth-century were often motivated by the need to clarify legal privileges or reinforce corporate identities, qualifying and adjusting how past was represented. Even the more modest pamphlet histories, which were usually only brief surveys possessing little sense of commentary or interpretation, were still capable of illuminating aspects of their civic society. These printed histories were accessible enough that the record of events they provided could be re-assimilated into people's perception of the past to legitimate normative ideas about social relations and governance. The claims which continued to be made about the past can be traced in the pages of these histories, revealing the ways in which the inhabitants of eighteenth-century Norwich perceived and represented themselves.

The earliest of these histories, like the first Norwich newspapers, were created by the newly established presses which sprang up in the city, as elsewhere in the provinces, to feed the growing market for popular print following the expiry of the Licensing Act in 1695.¹ They were slight affairs, produced less for a scholarly audience than to satisfy the interest of a largely local readership. The audience for the press that emerged in this period was not confined to the middling and upper orders of local society but embraced a broader cross-section of the population, creating a "mass audience of citizens, most of whom had political opinions but not the vote."²

Whilst the scale of literacy at the time is open to debate, the picture which has emerged is one of the popular press meeting demand from readers across the social spectrum. Contemporary reports support such assumptions by observing the demand amongst sections of the labouring classes for newspapers, ballad sheets, chapbooks and penny histories. Campaigns at the beginning of the century by the Society for the Reformation of Manners produced large print runs of pamphlets for distribution through alehouses and taverns. While these and similar initiatives by the SPCK, targeting the lower orders, might not provide accurate figures, they do reflect how widespread reading was amongst the lower ranks of urban society.³

Although it is hard to determine wages with any precision for the first half of the eighteenth-century, examples provide us with a very general idea of going-rates, although they still provide little idea of

¹ David Stoker, 'The Establishment of Printing in Norwich' in Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society 7:1 (1977), pp.94-111

² Nicholas Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics in the reigns of Queen Anne and the early Hanoverians', in Pocock, Schochet & Schwoerer (ed.), The Varieties of British Political Thought (Cambridge, 1993), p.216

³ Victor E. Neuberg, Popular Education (London, 1971), pp.99, 130-1; Thomas Laqueur, 'The Cultural Origins of Popular Literacy in England 1500-1850', Oxford Review of Education 2:3 (1976), pp.255-75

disposable wealth.⁴ Certainly, although the 6d cost of William Chase's pamphlet history *A Compleat History of Norwich* might not have been affordable to the poorest, it was still cheap enough to be within the resources of skilled labourers, tradesmen or innkeepers.⁵ However as an alternative to such items being bought outright by customers it was common practice for booksellers to operate circulating libraries, and for a small rental fee lend out a section of their stock to customers.⁶ Similarly the proliferation of printed publications after the beginning of the century saw taverns, coffee houses and clubs provide newspapers, periodicals and pamphlets for their clientele, and it became commonplace for premises to attract customers by advertising a range of up-to-date titles.

Joseph Addison memorably estimated that as a result of the reading practices of the period the actual readership of the *Spectator* was far greater than the number of copies sold, with each copy averaging at least twenty readers.⁷ A poem entitled *The Weaver*, distributed throughout the city in 1720 to highlight the recent demise of trade, described the working life of a journeyman Norwich weaver and specifically referred to the popular role played by reading and conversation.

Twas then I could to jovial Clubs repair, And pass my
Evenings pleasurably there... Sometimes the public News
was our debate... Sometimes domestic Cases were our
Care, A Sheriffs Election or a future May'r.⁸

⁴ T.S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England* (London, 1964), pp.217-26; Corfield, *Social and Economic History*, pp.244-5

⁵ NM, 17th Feb 1727/8

⁶ John Feather, *The Provincial Book Trade* (Cambridge, 1985), p.41; Timothy Keymer, *The Fawning Sycophant Display'd* (Norwich, 1754), p.16

⁷ 'Spectator #10, Monday 12th March, 1711' quoted in Angus Ross (ed.), *Selections from the Tatler and Spectator* (Harmondsworth, 1982), p.210

⁸ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, *Acta Norviciensa* vol.I, p.3

Although the poem presents the weaver as an idealised figure the reference would have been recognisable to many in the city. Such pursuits were not the preserve of the well-to-do, and these forms of sociable association could be mixed affairs, attracting a range of people across the social spectrum. Voluntary association was an important element of urban life, not just for the polite classes, but, anecdotal evidence suggests, for the labouring poor as well. In addition to more socially selective clubs, coffee-houses and alehouses provided opportunities for association and political discussion, accessible to people of all classes. Benjamin Mackerell in his unpublished history of Norwich boasted of the spirit of fellowship which predominated in the city,

the gentlemen and better sort of tradesmen keep their clubs constantly every night of the week some at one tavern some at another, neither are the alehouses empty, for there are many persons of good fashion and credit that meet every night at one or other of these houses besides great numbers that are filled with poor labouring working men.⁹

For contemporaries the coffee house in particular became a distinctive, if somewhat idealised, figure in the typology of the period, closely bound to the growth of the press and the new economic markets. They offered a forum for news and discussion, where patrons could go to read the newspapers, but more generally as a hub for print and correspondence networks, with much emphasis placed on the practice of reading aloud, and discussions with other patrons.¹⁰ It has, however, also been noted that although formative in the development of public discourse, the similar role

⁹ Norf. RO, Rye MS 78, Benjamin Mackerell, MS The History of the City of Norwich both Ancient and Modern vol.II, 1736, p.218

¹⁰ Love, Scribal Publication, pp.203-7

which had been formerly played by alehouses, taverns and inns as informal forums for discussion should not be disregarded.¹¹ However the coffee house, because public discussion was a defining feature of its existence, was emblematic of the way that print heralded the creation of public opinion.¹² To its critics the forms of public discourse intrinsic to the culture of the coffee house made "the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superiors", and encouraged social impropriety and disorder.¹³

'tis an Exchange where Haberdashers of *Political small wares* meet, and mutually abuse each other, and the Publique, with bottomless stories, and headless notions; the Rendezvous of *idle Pamphlets*, and persons more idly imployd to read them; a *High Court of Justice* where every little Fellow in a *Chamlet-Cloak* takes upon him to transpose Affairs both in Church and State, to show reasons against *Acts* of Parliament, and condemn the Decrees of *General Councils*.¹⁴

Steve Pincus has rightly drawn attention to the spread of coffee houses far beyond the metropolis, demonstrating their influence was both far more widespread and open to a range of people from different social stations.¹⁵ Whilst the actual equality of the public culture of the early eighteenth-century press and coffee houses seems to have been overstated, they certainly served to stimulate and encourage discussion about public affairs, and, by virtue of

¹¹ Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation* (Oxford, 2005), p.249-50

¹² Habermas, *Public Sphere*, pp.16-26

¹³ Sir Roger L'Estrange quoted in Burke, *Popular Culture*, p.270

¹⁴ *The Character of a Coffee-House* (London, 1673)

¹⁵ Pincus, "Coffee Politicians Does Create", pp.833-4

their accessibility, further promoted a culture of popular engagement in national and civic affairs.¹⁶

What this helps illustrate is that the kind of ideas about the past which were articulated in the eighteenth-century histories of Norwich were accessible to a wide range of people, from the civic elite down to labouring men and women. Yet it also demonstrates that the print culture and associational life of the eighteenth-century city combined to secure a relatively high degree of social intercourse between inhabitants from different social backgrounds, and provided the basis for a shared set of reference points for informing and discussing governance and social relations.

2. The city as commonwealth

The eighteenth-century histories of Norwich conveyed, in their summary of the civic courts and officers, a sense of their right to govern their own legal and administrative affairs. From the progressive development of the city's chartered liberties, a narrative emerged of the political and legal powers enacted by its institutions. Their continuity, ratified through successive royal charters and the passage of time, provided their constitutional authority.

The chronology appended to the 1623 edition of Nevill's *Norfolk Furies* dated the beginning of the city's government to the reign of King Etheldred, or Eldred, in the tenth-century, and hence before the Norman conquest. This fact was even referenced in the long title to the work. The claim was subsequently reiterated in the eighteenth-century pamphlet histories of the city, with its government by a *Serjeant* persisting to its civic incorporation nearly

¹⁶ Peter Clark, British Clubs and Societies (Oxford, 2000) p.73

two centuries later.¹⁷ Blomefield was chary of such an origin, and finding it repeated in one manuscript collection dismissed its documentary integrity, “never finding any thing like it”.¹⁸

By contrast, the story Blomefield related represented the status of the city as initially tied to the Crown directly through its castle. Almost from the first it was a royal castle, being the personal holding of first the Kings of the East Angles, and then the Saxon Kings of England. At the conquest, with the defeat of Harold, the castle passed to William I, and in turn to his successors.¹⁹ Although governed by the Earl of Norfolk, as the King’s bailiff, the castle could not be considered as a feudal holding of the Earls, but rather as the monarch’s directly. As such this distanced the city from the direct influence of feudal lords and seemingly underlined the distinctness of its status and its commercial social order.

The city’s charter was granted initially by Henry I, “providing the same franchises and liberties as the City of London then had”, and separating its jurisdiction from the castle, so that they were no longer governed by its constable, but by their own provost, appointed by the monarch.²⁰ The royal origins of the chartered liberties and privileges of the city and citizens were subject to periodic alteration and renewal by successive monarchs, and provided the opportunity for the city to press for greater power to govern their own affairs, securing their identity and independence to an ever greater degree, with the liberties of the City of London serving as the model they aspired to.

From the account offered by Blomefield the renewed liberties can be seen to have been secured both by the city’s loyalty, and the financial loans and gifts made to the crown. In fact, across the

¹⁷ Alexander Nevill, Norfolk Furies, and their Foyle (London, 1623); A Compleat History of the Famous City of Norwich, pp.10-1, 23

¹⁸ Blomefield, Norwich, p.4

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.3-12

²⁰ Ibid., pp.16-7

numerous renewals of the charter Blomefield renders explicit the kind of bargaining which took place, and emphasises the effectively reciprocal nature of the relationship between city and Crown. Whilst certainly not contractual, as the monarch could in principle confiscate the charters, and by definition unequal, it was however represented that both parties gained from the arrangement. In this sense Norwich's civic liberties were represented as procured by an exchange, akin to a commercial transaction.

When Richard I granted the city its own legal jurisdiction, able to try all pleas of the Crown as well as elect its own provosts, these chartered privileges, although limited and ultimately revocable, provided the basis for the administration of its own legal affairs, and for the governance of the city.²¹ However with the extension of the city's liberties it also provided the beginning of a drawn out series of acrimonious and often violent disputes with the monastery and cathedral regarding their overlapping jurisdictions, which were ultimately only put to bed with the Reformation. The frequent disorders these disagreements occasioned led in a number of cases to the city's charters being revoked by the monarch. In spite of this fact they possessed a continuity which meant that they could be considered by some as inalienable rights and customs.

Changes to the city charters in the first half of the fifteenth-century created a system of city government which, by the eighteenth-century, provided an unusually high degree of political representation, as well as solidifying a recognition of the liberties invested in the citizenry.²² These piecemeal changes to the governance of the city restructured its political organisation after the fashion of the City of London. The creation of Mayor and Aldermen, as well as a Common Council, a Guildhall, and the

²¹ Ibid., pp.25-8

²² Ibid., pp.88-9, 92-7, 99-101, 114

division of power to appoint offices between the representative bodies, was part of what has been identified as a tendency towards a more oligarchical system of government.²³ Yet the nature of these charters was such that they had come, by the end of the seventeenth-century, to solidify the concept of the *citizen* less around the aldermen and civic elite than around the commons and freeman electorate of the city. As such, the charters could be interpreted as a codified constitution defining citizens' representative privileges and their civic independence.²⁴

By the beginning of the eighteenth-century the city's franchise secured votes for both freeholders and the freemen citizenry of the city, and ensured that there was a significant core of voters among the expanding urban middling classes. The old 40s qualification for freeholders, introduced in the fifteenth-century as a means of ensuring only men of sufficient quality qualified, had been outpaced by inflation, and extended the electoral franchise to men of modest means.²⁵ This situation prompted some at the time to press for reducing the size of the electorate, restricting it to those to whom it was better suited.²⁶ The freeman populace, as those most likely to be involved in trade and commerce, accounted for both the wealthiest merchants of the city as well as men of a far more modest station.

By the early eighteenth-century many of those acquiring the freedom to ply their trade in the city were shopkeepers, professionals and master artisans of no more than middling social status. Whilst such a designation covered a diverse range of social and economic circumstances, this need not detract from its

²³ Peter Clark and Paul Slack, English Towns in Transition (Oxford, 1976), pp.126-40

²⁴ Rev. William Hudson, 'Development of the Municipal Organisation in Norwich', Archaeological Journal XLVI (1889)

²⁵ Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability, p.27

²⁶ Cannon, Parliamentary Reform, pp.33-4

usefulness as a reasonably coherent social category, albeit one which lacks precision.²⁷

The nature of the city's franchise created a civic culture which was far broader than being limited to just the wealthiest and most honourable members of the civic populace. It had created an active and inclusive political culture in which a significant proportion of the populace were enfranchised as citizens. Phil Withington's work has drawn attention to the role of urban incorporation in developing a distinctive political language of civic republicanism, whose inclusive, democratic tendencies have been obscured by historians' interpretation of it as a primarily oligarchical phenomenon.²⁸ Civic culture acted as

a template for the political, social and economic practice of citizens; informed more general conceptions of civil society; and addressed in particular, the role of 'the commons' – or middling sort – within it.²⁹

The civic humanism of the corporate commonwealth invested citizenship with virtuous qualities, which, when extended beyond the numerically small citizen elite to petty officeholders and freemen, prefigured the dilation of public discourse represented by coffee house culture.³⁰ The interpretation of the charters' capacity to institute rights and privileges by force of their continuity, as a form of customary practice, was open to dispute. Robert Brady, a prominent royalist and antiquarian, was sharply critical of such appeals to ancient constitutional rights:

²⁷ Derek Hirst, The Representative of the People? (Cambridge, 1975), p.93; Keith Wrightson, "'Sorts of People" in Tudor and Stuart England', in Barry and Brooks (ed.), The Middling Sort of People (Basingstoke, 1994), pp.49-50

²⁸ Phil Withington, The Politics of Commonwealth (Cambridge, 2005), p.86

²⁹ Ibid., p.267

³⁰ Ibid., pp.127, 149-151

the Notion that these Writers have, and their Readers cannot but have, of them, according to their Informations, they seem to have been Aeternal, or at least Coeval with the Creation, and so many ready Wrought, and Framed, small Commonwealths, lifted out the Chaos, and fixed upon the surface of the Earth.³¹

Brady argued that civic charters provided liberties only at the discretion of the Crown, and, as Blomefield's narrative indicated, they could not in any sense be truthfully considered unchanging and permanent, but could be revoked and redrawn on the monarch's authority. But Brady was arguing not just for the prerogative powers of the monarch, but also against the broader interpretation of the rights of the citizenry and commons. He repeatedly argued that the historical meaning of the citizenry had always been restrictive, and did not denote the freeman body as a whole.³² Brady published the *Historical Treatise of Cities* just a few years after the dispute over the legitimacy of the recall of the civic charters in 1682, which divided the city along party lines.

Charles II, as a means of gaining greater control over the corporations, and consequently over Parliament, recalled all civic charters to redraft them, giving him authority to personally select city magistrates, with *quo warranto* proceedings threatened against those corporations which failed to comply.³³ The Earl of Yarmouth pressed the city to volunteer their charter to the King, and the Tory majority in the city assembly voted accordingly, but met with considerable resistance from a section of the citizenry. When Yarmouth, on behalf of the king, attempted to appoint a deputy

³¹ Robert Brady, *An Historical Treatise of Cities* (London, 1704), p.i

³² Ibid., pp.20-1

³³ Evans, *17th Century Norwich*, pp.277-96; Paul D. Halliday, *Dismembering the Body Politic* (Cambridge, 1998), pp.149-88

recorder for the city the assembly was united in decrying his actions as “an infringement of the ancient liberties of the city, and even contrary to the new charter”.³⁴ The restoration of the city’s surrendered charter in 1688 was represented by Blomefield as normal service being resumed, safeguarding the independence of the corporation to govern its own affairs. When Blomefield’s *History* was published in 1745 this was the version of the charter still in use.

The constitutionalism of the common law tradition of Coke, against which Brady had railed, was still considered persuasive, appealing as it did to the force of custom providing ordered continuity with the past. As we have previously touched on, the logic of this school of thought rested, however, on a contradiction:

If the idea that law is custom implies anything, it is that law is in constant change and adaptation, altered to meet each new experience in the life of people... Yet the fact is, that the common lawyers, holding that law was custom, came to believe that the common law, and with it the constitution, had always been exactly as they were now, that they were immemorial.³⁵

The historicity of these claims were always going to be prone to documentary critique, and Brady’s ability as an antiquarian allowed him to illustrate that the fixity and immemoriality of custom were false, even as he failed to topple the edifice of the common law tradition.³⁶ Indeed, when Sir Matthew Hale’s *History of the Common Law* was published posthumously in 1713, it immediately established itself as authoritative, with its influence lasting long in

³⁴ Blomefield, *Norwich*, p.295

³⁵ Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution*, p.36

³⁶ Douglas, *English Scholars*, pp.155-9

the century.³⁷ In the commentary Hale, like Coke before him, attributed the authority of the common law to the "Common Usage, or Custom, and Practice of this Kingdom".³⁸ However Hale, as a legal reformer, was aware of this apparent paradox, and unlike Coke was not dependent on the questionable historical fact of its permanence. The common law was not ossified and immobile, but permitted *substantive* change, which did not affect the "continuity of English law in the crucial sense".³⁹ That is to say: as long as the constitutional framework of the law remained unchanged. Considered in light of this popular interpretation of legal change we can offer a qualification of the conception of the chartered liberties of the city offered in Blomefield and the documentary histories of Norwich.

Although subject to revocation and renewal by the Crown, the changing city charters represented substantive change only. But the force of long continuance meant that they shared a commonality in asserting the city's more fundamental constitutional rights to self-government, since at least the reign of Richard I, or, as some would have it, since King Eldred. In this sense the chartered freedoms and privileges of Norwich offered the rudiments of a legal constitution, and, by extension, dignified the citizen with a legal and political presence, which if not uncontested, contributed to a shared civic culture which was accessible to a broader sense of the public.

3. The character of the city

In the historical representation of the first settlement and foundation of Norwich an idea of its nature or original constitution

³⁷ J.H. Baker, An Introduction to English Legal History (London, 1990), pp.218-9

³⁸ Hale, History of the Common Law, p.44

³⁹ Charles M. Gray, 'Introduction', in Hale, History of the Common Law, pp.xxvi-xxx

was appealed to, an idea which defined its character. In a sense this idea represented a mythological conception of the city, less in terms of fable, than in the context of myth having "the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal."⁴⁰ The appeal to the city's origins by the historians of the city was used as a way of naturalising it, establishing a formative character which then framed its subsequent development.

Both Nevill and Camden had placed the origins of the city in the nearby Roman camp of Venta Icenorum, once "the most flourishing city of this people"⁴¹, but long since reduced to ruins and the village of Caistor St. Edmund raised on its site. To a similar effect Mackerell invoked an old folk-saying, that "Castor was a city when Norwich was none, And Norwich was built with Castor stone."⁴² This account of the city's foundation was developed further by the antiquary Thornhaugh Gurdon in his *Essay on the Antiquity of the Castel of Norwich*. The later histories of Benjamin Mackerell and Blomefield both drew to some degree on Gurdon's account of the early conditions for the progress of the city, with Mackerell in particular reproducing large sections of it almost verbatim.

While Sir Thomas Browne and Camden had possessed little documentary evidence of the pre-literate foundations of the city, their accounts projected little from the Antonine itinerary or coins excavated at local sites.⁴³ Gurdon, however, was willing to go further, appealing to Roman documentary sources to sketch out a model of generalised urban development, which significantly prefigured the later state of Norwich.⁴⁴ According to Gurdon, Venta Icenorum and its like provided a natural focus for the surrounding

⁴⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (St. Albans, 1973), p.142

⁴¹ Camden, *Britannia*, p.473

⁴² Norf. RO, MS 78, Benjamin Mackerell, MS The History of the City of Norwich both Ancient and Modern, vol.I, 1736

⁴³ Sir Thomas Browne, 'Hydriotaphia', in *Religio Medici* (London, 1965), p.104

⁴⁴ Gurdon, *Antiquity of the Castel of Norwich*, pp.5-11

countryside, attracting its inhabitants to sell their produce there, so that markets became established at their gates as a permanent fixture. The 'country people' could not enter the camp and sell without licence from the commanding officer, who had "oversight of the Market, punished such as sold by false Weights and Measures, brought bad Provisions, or were guilty of any other Offence".⁴⁵

This developmental narrative could theoretically be applied more generally to any urban settlement, yet the emphases that he made in applying it to Norwich drew out key features that he clearly felt were characteristic of the city in particular. Such a character unified past and present by establishing continuity, complementing the contemporary self-image of the city as primarily a place of commerce and industry. So the "Roman Officer that judged at the Gate of the Camp all Differences in the Market, was succeeded by Saxon Castellans and their Officers; which latter were succeeded by the Stewards of the Court of Pipowders, and Clerks of the Market."⁴⁶

Gurdon postulated a line of continuous practice from the settlement of Venta Icenorum by the Romans as a settled and ordered market, through its relocation to a nearby site, better located geographically as a trading centre, where it became Norwich, and then to the Norman development of the city as an ecclesiastical as well as commercial hub. This emphasis on Norwich's character as principally a centre for mercantile commerce was supported by Blomefield's description of its geographical situation,

fishermen and merchants fixing here for traffick sake; for it is plain that it was a fishing town, even in King Canute's time, for then Alfric the Bishop gave to the abbey of Bury... a last of herrings every year; so that the account of the Danes coming with their ships to the castle here, which

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.8

⁴⁶ Ibid.

some look upon as a fable, was certainly fact, the sea (if I may so call it, or rather a very extensive arm of it) coming hither till the Conqueror's time.⁴⁷

It followed that it was natural for Norwich to become a trading centre. Furthermore, as an established port in its own right, it restated claims for precedence in its traffic navigating the river inland from the sea, thereby justifying its liberties at Great Yarmouth, which sat at the mouth of the river. The city's mercantile nature seemed an extension of its geographic situation, and the existence of Norwich itself virtually a result of its economic functions.

When describing the Normans' settlement on the site of the parishes of St. Peter Mancroft and St. Giles, Blomefield drew a further line of continuity with the eighteenth-century's prosperous trading hub, concentrated around the city's market place.⁴⁸ Parish reconstructions for the 1670s show at that time the parish of St Peter Mancroft was one of the most populous in the city, yet still affluent enough for almost three quarters of the households listed to qualify to pay the hearth tax.⁴⁹ Although only a rough index, the figures for the number of hearths provide an idea of the distribution of residents' material wealth.

The homes of most of the city's aldermanic elite and its resident gentry possessed between 10 and 25 hearths, and of the more than one hundred houses of that size in Norwich, almost half were concentrated in St. Peter Mancroft and the adjacent parishes of St. Andrew, St. Stephen and St. Gregory.⁵⁰ These parishes comprised

⁴⁷ Blomefield, Norwich, p.2

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.14

⁴⁹ John Pound, 'Poverty, Wealth and Occupations in Restoration Norwich', in Peter Seaman (ed.), Norfolk Hearth Tax Exemption Certificates (London, 2001), p.xlv

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.xliv-xlvi

the city's commercial centre and was home to many of the city's tradesmen and shopkeepers, and in particular the distributive trades. A significant number of these men, whilst not as wealthy as the aldermen and wealthiest citizens, were still comparatively well-to-do. Most of the common councillors of the city, and its less well-off aldermen, occupied homes with between three and nine hearths.⁵¹ If Pound is correct in estimating those with three or more hearths as comprising the city's middling sort they were, even by the 1670s, a significant presence in St. Peter Mancroft. 28% of the households listed for St Peter Mancroft possessed 3-5 hearths, and a further 11% had between 6 and 9 hearths.⁵² Almost 73% of those involved in the city's distributive trades, such as grocers, drapers and mercers, were rated at this level, and by the eighteenth-century made an important contribution to the city's economic life.⁵³

It was common knowledge that central to the wealth and prominence of Norwich was the development of the wool and textile trades, which dominated the economic life of the city throughout the early modern period, right up until the later eighteenth-century. Blomefield emphasised the central importance to the city's development of the settlement of Dutch immigrants in the reign of Henry I, bringing the mysteries of their craft with them. With the arrival of weaving in Norwich it became "the most flourishing city in all England, by means of its great trade in worsteds, fustians, freezes, and other woollen manufactures".⁵⁴ Not only did the textile industry increase mercantile commerce, but Blomefield placed great stress on its value as a labour intensive activity, requiring many hands to support each stage of the manufacture, employing an

⁵¹ Ibid., p.xlvi

⁵² Ibid., p.xliii, xlvi

⁵³ John Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich (Chichester, 1988), p.184

⁵⁴ Blomefield, Norwich, p.62

army of “sorters, combers, carders, spinsters, fullers, dyers, pressers, packers, &c.”⁵⁵

The role of its manufactures in the city’s ascendancy was echoed elsewhere, with one projected history advertising a narrative recounting “all the gradual Improvements of Trade, to the present Extension of Commerce... which have raised Norwich from a poor Village of Fishermen's Cottages, to a Flourishing, Powerful and Opulent City.”⁵⁶ In addition to materially benefitting both the city and the nation, it was also understood that its commercial culture was a source of good order. Those who had previously struggled to eke out a living were put to work and prospered in this climate of industry, “an incredible profit accrued to the people, by its passing through and employing so many”.⁵⁷ Early eighteenth-century moralists found in the prosperity of the manufacturing trade a palliative to the social ills attendant on poverty and laziness, providing “Business for the Indigent, so that the Advantage obtained by Trade may be disused to the lowest of its Members, and prevent their falling into Divisions, Tumults, Rebellions, Debauchery and Thi[e]ving”.⁵⁸

The city’s industrious character provided an important form of self-identification which had been emphasised in the measures regulating its poor in the sixteenth-century, and which was reiterated by the legislation at the beginning of the eighteenth for the maintenance of its workhouses.⁵⁹ The descriptions of the city by Nevill and Camden made much of its diligence, and that character was reiterated in the oft-quoted contemporary reports from the travels of Celia Fiennes and Daniel Defoe, as “a rich thriving

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ NM, 21st December 1751

⁵⁷ Blomefield, Norwich, p.62

⁵⁸ John Haynes, ‘Great Britain’s Glory’, p.2 in English Wool Trade (Farnborough, 1968). Originally published in 1715.

⁵⁹ See ch.3

industrious place”,⁶⁰ with “the inhabitants being all busy at their manufactures”.⁶¹ Defoe’s *Tour* offered more than just a description of these places, and represented an apologia for his own views, offering his perception of the ascendancy of mercantile and industrial interests in contrast to the declining power of those landed gentry who refused to embrace improvement and trade.⁶² Crucially, the textile industry was a source of not only wealth, but prestige.

The unitary character of this representation of the city tended to gloss over the existence of a plurality of sometimes competing interests. Norwich’s interests were ordinarily identified with the interests of the textile manufactory, and particularly so after 1714 when the Whigs actively courted the city’s textile manufactory.⁶³ Such an identification was not unreasonable; the textile industry was central to the prosperity and stability of the city and of its surrounding economic region. However this is not to say that the interests of the manufacturing and mercantile elite of the city were identical with either those whose livelihoods depended on the trade, or, in general, the promotion of good civic order. Rather, this historical representation of the city offered a ‘public transcript’ which created the appearance of consensual unanimity, minimising the appearance of divergence and discord, and helping “foster a public image of cohesion and shared belief.”⁶⁴ This did not mean that everyone accepted it unconditionally, but as the commonly accepted representation of the public interest they were bound to appeal to it as a refractory medium for legitimating their own claims and interests.

⁶⁰ Celia Fiennes, *The Journeys* (London, 1983), pp.176-9

⁶¹ Defoe, *A Tour*, pp.84-7

⁶² Thomas Keith Meier, *Defoe and the Defense of Commerce* (Victoria, 1987), pp.56-78

⁶³ Rogers, *Whigs and Cities*, p.334-6

⁶⁴ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p.55

This emphasis on production and commerce also served – crucially for a burgeoning literate middle class – to highlight the character of the city and its citizenry as rooted in industry and trade, and the centrality of the marketplace to its civic life. Urban society was by its nature rooted in trade. A town was a place of profit, for national profit in fact, but also of socialisation, by which it functioned as a means of civilising the nation and securing political and economic stability.⁶⁵ The definition offered a generation later by Samuel Johnson opposed ‘polite’ to ‘rustic,’ emphasising the degree to which urbanism was perceived as a vector for civility.⁶⁶

The landed classes relied on urban centres to supply their demand for professional services and consumer goods, but many county gentry were also taking up residency in Norwich, from where they had better access to the social life and civil intercourse offered, as a hub of county life on which provincial networks intersected.⁶⁷ The later seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries were a period of marked social mobility and Alan Everitt influentially categorised a section of the most affluent bourgeoisie as constituting an urban *pseudo-gentry*, who, without possessing landed estates, had achieved a level of economic independence which afforded them the trappings of a genteel and leisured existence.⁶⁸ Later eighteenth-century accounts described the fashion of some of the most prosperous merchant-manufacturers to sport a sword and assume “a lordly bearing, and a marked line of distinction was preserved between the merchants and shopkeepers”.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Phil Withington, Society in Early Modern England (Cambridge, 2010), pp.218-223

⁶⁶ Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language vol.I (London, 1756); Samuel Johnson, A Dictionary of the English Language vol.II (London, 1756)

⁶⁷ Corfield, ‘From Second City to Regional Capital’, p.146

⁶⁸ Everitt, ‘Social Mobility’, p.71

⁶⁹ Letter from ‘Senex’ to The East Anglian Newspaper, quoted in James, Worsted Manufacture, p.261

Norwich's role as a county town, serving the needs of the county and an expanding consumer market, meant that shops and warehouses sprang up to offer a range of products, as well as the latest fashions. By the mid-eighteenth-century it was reported that fifty-six different cries of retailers could be heard in the city's streets.⁷⁰ This concentration of professional services and tradesman fostered a prosperous middle class, and, as important as the role of the gentry and pseudo-gentry was to the development of provincial urban culture, it was the emergent middle classes who largely drove these processes of improvement, which Peter Borsay has termed the 'urban renaissance'.⁷¹

Many of the stuffs produced in the city were aimed at the fashionable markets of the time, and the city's reputation for urbanity and politeness helped maintain demand for their manufactures.⁷² The development of infrastructure made journey times between towns faster and cheaper, and sped up the communication of goods, news and credit. Periodicals like the *Gentleman's Magazine* perpetuated the sense of genteel networks of correspondents, to which you had access for the cover price. In addition to the coffee houses and taverns there were a number of clubs such as The Ancient Society of Abingdons and The Sons of Flora.⁷³ In the Maid's Head Inn, near the Cathedral, the city's first Masonic Lodge was established in 1724, founded by Martin Folkes of the Society of Antiquaries and Royal Society, and its first twenty-four members included four future Sheriffs of the city, and a High Sheriff of Norfolk. The lodge assumed a premier position in city and county society, with members of the county's prominent gentry

⁷⁰ William Arderon quoted in Corfield, *Social and Economic History*, p.109

⁷¹ Borsay, *English Urban Renaissance*, pp.203-4; Angela Dain, 'An Enlightened and Polite Society', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, *Norwich since 1550*, p.194

⁷² Corfield, *Social and Economic History*, pp.50-1

⁷³ John L'Estrange (ed.), *Eastern Counties Collectanea* (Norwich, 1872-3), pp.195-6; *NG*, 11th Jul. 1730; Alan Everitt, 'The English Urban Inn', in Everitt (ed.), *Perspectives in English Urban History* (London, 1974), pp.110-3

families as well as the city's elite, and straddled boundaries of partisan affiliation. Its exclusiveness was underlined when it later introduced a fee of £3.3s to be paid before admission.⁷⁴

Other pursuits and forms of association were similarly exclusive. The Duke of Norfolk's gardens were laid out with a bowling green in the 1660s and remained a popular resort long after his palace had been pulled down, most particularly during the entertainments of assize week. Several hundred yards along the river a resort opened by the gardener John Moore in 1739 as the 'New Spring Garden,' named after the famous London pleasure-garden, was furnished with walks and offered refreshments to its patrons, and later added genteel entertainments such as concerts, illuminations and fireworks. The cost of tickets for the gardens – after 1749 charging 1s – placed it beyond the means of the meaner sort who might divert themselves on Mousehold Heath, and meant that that it remained an exclusive and socially genteel environment.⁷⁵ In part this process of social segregation was in marked contrast to the general situation in the city, in which the limitations on space necessarily pushed the different social classes up against one another. With the exceptions of the hamlets of Heigham and Pockthorpe the city's population was still largely confined within its medieval walls, and this situation did not change significantly until the early nineteenth-century.

Norwich's assembly rooms were opened in 1754, and, although it would be easy to treat it as a straightforward monument to eighteenth-century gentility, it was only one aspect of a much more pervasive phenomenon. The improvement of the city was an ongoing process, gradually transforming the late medieval physical structure and modernising it by bringing it into closer conformity

⁷⁴ Hamon Le Strange, History of Freemasonry in Norfolk (Norwich, 1896), pp.11-5

⁷⁵ Trevor Fawcett, 'The Norwich Pleasure Gardens', Norfolk Archaeology 35 (1973), pp.383-4; Borsay, English Urban Renaissance, pp.293-5

with the aesthetic standards of the day, in which it looked to the commercial hub of London as its paragon.⁷⁶ Through this self-conscious emulation of a universal model of politeness and civility the provincial gentry and pseudo-gentry, as well as the emerging commercial middle classes, were fostering a truly national culture, in which urbanism figured as a model of change, an agent for civilising society.

Norwich, like other large industrial cities, also had comparatively high levels of labour migration, with workers moving both in and out of the city for work, and consequently problems arose in terms of assimilating incomers.⁷⁷ In these settings alehouses and taverns provided food, credit, and access to information, but were also sites where work was advertised and labour acquired by manufacturers. For migrant labourers, like the journeymen weavers and woolcombers who arrived from the countryside or other textile towns, these forms of voluntary association assisted the process of adapting to the peculiarities of urban life, and offered fraternal bonds which served many of the same functional requirements as kinship ties they may have left behind. The meetings and structured roles and rituals offered by society membership provided the incomer with a degree of identity and stability, but also helped adaptation “by acting as a ‘civilizing’ agency on his behalf. It inculcates new standards of dress, social behaviour and personal hygiene”.⁷⁸

Urbanity was more important than mere affectation, and in the aftermath of the factionalism and strife of the seventeenth-century represented for some the capacity for polite sociability. Similarly for Defoe and Addison the commercial force represented by cities was

⁷⁶ Borsay, English Urban Renaissance, pp.286-8

⁷⁷ Ian D. Whyte, Migration and Society (Basingstoke, 2000), p.102

⁷⁸ Kenneth Little, West African Urbanization (Cambridge, 1965), pp.86-9

an agent for progress and social mobility, which resolved the poverty and strife of feudalism:

When we had no Trade, we had no Ships, no populous Cities, no Numbers of People, no Wealth compar'd to what we see now; Provisions bore no Price, Lands yielded no Rent; and why? The Reason is plain and short; 'tis sum'd up in a Word, Labour brought in no Wages... The People were divided into Master and Servant; not Landlord and Tenant, but the Lord and the Vassal; the Tenant paid no Rent, but held his Lands in vassalage; that is, for services to be performed... The under People to these Tenants held by Villenage... [to] do all servile Labours; and for this they had their Bread...⁷⁹

This conception of trade provided the idea of mercantile men as useful and valuable to the nation, with urban society offering a legitimate order of social being distinct from the traditional landed interest, which typically conceived of material power and order as vested in land ownership within their localities, and disparaged the increasing influence of commerce and paper credit. Political and economic changes, with their tendency towards centralising power, threatened to destabilise the settled social relations on the land, dissolving the reciprocal bonds of a vestigial patriarchy which held these localities together.

As such, the picture of the country Defoe presented has been described as Whiggish in its valorisation of commercial over landed interests. We need to be cautious as to how closely we accept this definition, as although it identifies a shift in political and social relations it is also overly simplistic to think of land and commerce as

⁷⁹ Daniel Defoe, A Plan of English Commerce (London, 1728), p.17

polar opposites, mapping directly onto antinomies between city and county, or Whig and Tory. More properly it was not mercantile commerce itself which polarised affairs, but the stock-jobbers and government financiers, who were felt to be flourishing at the expense of increased land taxes. It was this "new interest... and a sort of property which was not known twenty years ago"⁸⁰ which comprised the source of the great 'corruption' against which the Country interest mobilised.

By the 1730s and 1740s, such ideological, partisan differences were in practice frequently far from clear cut. Land and commerce were not so readily separable, as the city's merchant classes maintained close ties to the land-owning county gentry, both in business and polite intercourse. As a county town, as well as a centre of production and commerce, Norwich provided a resort for the county's elite, where they socialised in the same genteel circles as the city's prosperous bourgeoisie. Relatively few of the city's trading families converted their financial success into land-holdings in the county, and they tended to base themselves in the proximity of the city and retain an active role in trade, rather than forgo it for the life of a country squire.⁸¹ Although lacking the prestige of the City of London's trading companies the rising importance of the Norwich textile trade in the seventeenth-century meant that many sons of the gentry had been apprenticed into it, and by 1718 the corporation could boast that their "Apprentices for the most part were the Sons of the Gentlemen and Clergy".⁸² The corporation of Norwich itself held numerous estates in both city and county, whose rents supported its charitable institutions and its system of poor relief.

⁸⁰ Henry St. John to Lord Orrery, 9th July 1709, quoted in Holmes and Speck (ed.), The Divided Society (London, 1967), p.135

⁸¹ Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone, An Open Elite? (Oxford, 1984), pp.212-225; Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.235-7

⁸² The Humble Petition of the Mayor, Sheriffs, Justices, Aldermen and Common-Council of the City of Norwich (1718); Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich, pp.47-8

Defoe, although explicitly proselytising for commerce, frequently appealed to the close connections between the two as signifying the superiority of English trade, echoing Thomas Sprat's belief that the character of the merchant class was raised by its gentry origins.⁸³ He downplayed the reality of an opposition between the two, arguing that in practice commercial and landed interests were inextricably linked, "the Blood of Trade is mix'd and blended with the Blood of Gallantry".⁸⁴ The people best set to benefit from the economic transformation offered by trade would actually be the landed gentlemen, as rising prices of provisions would consequently cause the rents they garnered from their estates to rise.⁸⁵ Ultimately any such arguments maintained that the positions could be reconciled, although the fundamental tension between the two was clearly felt, "the complicated jealousies and bitterness of that shifting and relative historical process"⁸⁶ provided much of the basis for the 'Country' political opposition of both Tory and Country-Whig alike throughout the century.⁸⁷

It is in the context of this play of ideological forces that Thornhaugh Gurdon's history should be considered. Gurdon, like John Kirkpatrick, was among Peter Le Neve's associates who had been admitted Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries in 1718.⁸⁸ He was part of a prominent county gentry family from Letton, and maintained close links to Sir John Wodehouse. In the latter part of Queen Anne's reign, Wodehouse's influence as a member of parliament for the county helped Gurdon to secure a position as

⁸³ Sprat, History of the Royal Society, p.88

⁸⁴ Daniel Defoe, A Review of the Affairs of France vol.II (London, 1705), p.9

⁸⁵ Defoe, A Plan of the English Commerce, p.17

⁸⁶ Raymond Williams, The Country and the City (St. Albans, 1973), p.66

⁸⁷ H.T. Dickinson, Liberty and Property (London, 1977), pp.51-3; J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment (Princeton, 1975), pp.423-61

⁸⁸ Society of Antiquaries of London, Mark Noble, MS Lives of the Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries, 1818. Gurdon's entry on the list of fellows of the Society of Antiquaries is incorrect, listing him with his brother's name, Brampton. Noble compounded this error by adding his grandfather's biography.

Receiver-General for Norfolk, and he subsequently aligned himself closely with the interest of the Duke of Ormond, who displaced Townshend as Lord Lieutenant for the county.⁸⁹ However at the Hanoverian accession his connection to Ormond effectively exiled him from public office as a crypto-Jacobite, listed amongst those loyal to the Pretender by the convicted plotter Christopher Layer, although he remained a respected figure amongst the gentlemen of the county.⁹⁰

As has been seen, Gurdon did not oppose the commercial character of Norwich as antithetical to his defence of the country interest, but rooted the economic and political liberties of the city and citizens in a feudal past. Progress and innovation to society were represented as threatening the economic and political intercourse which had been safeguarded by their long continuance. Gurdon articulated a variation of belief in an ancient constitution, of which it has been observed, "once freed from the implications of Stuart absolutism a feudal origin for the Parliament was amenable to the landed prejudices of the day".⁹¹

By contrast Blomefield's history can be interpreted as conveying a rather different emphasis, insofar as, although rooted in the medieval past, the customs of the city were seen from the time of William the Conqueror onwards to have been paid for by the burgesses in cash, rather than services.⁹² In doing so, he helped emphasise the distinctness of the urban social order from feudal norms, and as part of an exchange which enabled them to be thought of as, at least in some measure, independent. Maitland succinctly stated this same point.

⁸⁹ Charles John Palmer, The Perlustration of Great Yarmouth vol.I (Great Yarmouth, 1872), p.341; John Burke, A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Commoners vol.I (London, 1834), p.396; The East Anglian V (1893-4).

⁹⁰ Paul S. Fritz, The English Ministers and Jacobitism (Toronto, 1975), p.143

⁹¹ R.J. Smith, The Gothic Bequest (Cambridge, 1987), p.50

⁹² Blomefield, Norwich, p.12

We may say that the mercantile spirit of the borough affects the houses; it claims to bequeath them 'like chattels,' and it is in the boroughs that landownership first reaches a modern degree of purity and intensity.⁹³

The conception of Norwich as principally a commercial entity meant that its inhabitants' status as citizens was broadly felt to be coextensive with their status as economic agents. If, however, the historical account of the development of commercial life provided the justification for the power of the mercantile elite of the city in these terms, then the petit-bourgeoisie and middling sort of eighteenth-century Norwich were also capable of finding in this treatment of commercial life as intrinsically virtuous, the means to claim access on their own behalf to the channels of social and political influence that afforded.

4. Expectations of paternalist governance

Even the barest pamphlet histories of Norwich were capable of conveying a sense of the distempers which threatened the stability and well-being of the city, and underlined the necessity of the authorities' intervention in the administration of civic order. The chronologies and narratives from Nevill onwards, most lacking any real historical detail or analysis, were however able to vividly represent the disturbances to the city's population, as they marked the impact of each famine or epidemic, consistent with the

⁹³ F.W. Maitland, Township and Borough (Cambridge, 1898), pp.71-2

characteristically early modern sensitivity to the threat of dearth, and the requisite threat posed to the social order.⁹⁴

In one such case Blomefield recounted that during the seventeenth-century outbreak of the plague the city's magistracy were ordered to ensure that the ditches were kept clear, and that all movements of people and goods in and out of the city were policed to prevent the disease spreading beyond its walls. With the forced cessation of textile production that resulted, many of the labouring poor were left with no means of supporting themselves, so the city authorities intervened to provide them with paid labour until trade resumed.⁹⁵ Blomefield's history provided the sense of an active, interventionist magistracy who ruled with a duty of care for the civilian populace, and its example, if not explicitly lauded, was represented as following standards of government which tempered expectations.

However similar narratives, lacking Blomefield's detail and scholarly touch, were no less able to convey a sense of the necessity of good governance in maintaining order. *The Records of Norwich*, a pamphlet compilation, described when poor harvests forced up the price of provisions in 1314, "so that the common People were not able to live", Parliament attempted to regulate food prices, even as the "Poor stole fat Dogs to eat; some in hidden places eat the Flesh of their own Children".⁹⁶ The account told how the King intervened to rule that no corn was to be malted for use in brewing, so that it might only be baked into bread. The maintenance of good civic order was clearly depicted in these sort of accounts as relying on the intervention of the authorities in the market. However readers would have recognised in these stories the basis for conventions which seemed to extend to their own time.

⁹⁴ John Walter and Keith Wrightson, 'Dearth and the Social Order in Early-Modern England', *Past & Present* 71 (May 1976), pp.22-42

⁹⁵ Blomefield, *Norwich*, pp.261-2

⁹⁶ *The Records of Norwich pt.II*, pp.4-5

In this way the histories provided numerous examples of good and bad governance in civil administration, and helped articulate a sense of how to govern, but also of how the populace expected, and assented, to be governed. Gurdon's *Antiquity of the Castel of Norwich* provided early examples of the city courts deriving their authority from a continuous practice of paternalist governance in regulating the market.⁹⁷ Such a position was consistent with Gurdon's own beliefs about social order and the rhetoric of his political position, but similar views were also expressed by Blomefield. Although the subtext of their historical interpretations differed, both men were in agreement that good governance was a necessary precondition for the commerce of the city to flourish.

The corporation itself was a legal fiction, a *body incorporate* treated in law as a distinct, albeit artificial, entity, and possessing the same legal rights to property as a person. It was understood in contemporary legal and historical thought that the corporations, constituted in this sense through being incorporated and embodied by royal charter, grew out of the medieval guilds, and preserved the same sense of their insisting in the association of men "joyned together in a City, Town or Burrough, into one fellowship, Brotherhood, or Mind".⁹⁸ By this I do not mean to say that it was built on an idea of equality. In fact, the opposite was the case; hierarchy was an intrinsic element of corporate life. However the corporation rested on an organic sense of community, which also implied a certain sense of responsible governance, which has been best described as paternalist, as for example in the application of the assize of bread.

The corporate character of the guilds was integral to the governance of the medieval city and to the notions of citizenship,

⁹⁷ Gurdon, *Antiquity of the Castel of Norwich*, pp.7-8

⁹⁸ Madox, *Firma Burgi*, pp.27-30; William Shephard, *Of Corporations, Fraternities, and Guilds* (London, 1659), pp.1-5

based on fraternal association which constituted, or as Weber points out "at least interpreted," them as corporate bodies.⁹⁹ The continuation of their controls was enacted through the powers to search, and most significantly through the apprenticeship system, which was carried on by the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, which effectively engrossed some of the regulatory functions performed by the guilds into statute law and the purview of the early modern state. The overwhelming concern of that body of policy was the maintenance of social stability, their economic policy "supplied by the extension of the traditional municipal system to the larger territory of the state."¹⁰⁰ That inherited civic corporative logic was manifest in the subordination of economic activity under the Tudors and Stuarts to a "commitment to stability through the subordination of economic life to social and political considerations."¹⁰¹

John Collinges, the leader of Norwich's Presbyterian faction in the later seventeenth-century defended the necessity of corporate bodies to govern trade, invoking scriptural precedents for the necessity of economic regulation.¹⁰² The goodness of trade was dependent on the honesty and probity of its governors, assembled as a corporation, to guard against practices such as undercutting prices and to regulate the price of provisions. There was then a generalised normative expectation regarding governors' responsibilities, which secured obedience and maintained good civic order. The deference and cooperation of the civilian population to the city's governors was based on an expectation of paternalist services, with their condescension and commitment to public's wellbeing a condition of their power and status.¹⁰³ Deference legitimated and reinforced the social hierarchy by securing

⁹⁹ Weber, Economy and Society, pp.1241, 1277-8

¹⁰⁰ Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston, 1968), p.70

¹⁰¹ Joyce Oldham Appleby, Economic Thought and Ideology (Princeton, 1980), p.27

¹⁰² J.C. [John Collinges], The Weavers Pocket-Book (London, 1675) pp.151-5

¹⁰³ Frank O'Gorman, Voters, Patrons and Parties (Oxford, 1989), pp.225-34

expectations on the part of the populace as to how they should be governed.¹⁰⁴ As has been touched on, the unitary and hierarchical image of the city presented by its governors was not necessarily unquestioned, but provided a 'public transcript' which mediated social relations and engendered a mutually recognisable sense of proper civic governance.

Historians have demonstrated the role that custom played in regulating social relations, and have helped heighten awareness of the extent of negotiation in the exercise of power. E.P. Thompson's influential analysis of paternalism showed how governors, as much as governed, were expected to fulfil certain mutually interdependent roles.

There is a sense in which rulers and crowd needed each other, watched each other, performed theatre and counter theatre to each other's auditorium, moderated each other's political behaviour. This is a more active and reciprocal relationship than the one normally brought to mind under the formula 'paternalism and deference'.¹⁰⁵

The legitimacy of rule was predicated on certain expectations, in which the exercise of the law and governance were seen to be justly observed.¹⁰⁶ The Guild day processions, when the new Mayor was sworn into office, were not displays of citizen equality but a piece of ritual theatre, reinforcing the hierarchy of social relations in which the city's magistracy played their role. Once their oaths were publicised their words acquired a legalistic gloss, emphasising the formal content of their commitment

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Joyce, Work, Society and Politics (London, 1982), pp.93-4

¹⁰⁵ Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', p.57

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, Whigs and Hunters, pp.258-65

[to] susteyn executen and mayntene, the lawes, libertes, fraunchises, gode customes, and ordenaunces, of the cete of Norwich, and the pes, and tranquillite in the same cite... and that ye shall do justice and egall right, as well to the pore, as to the riche...¹⁰⁷

A pervasive sense of order and legalism can be seen then to have extended to all sections of the city, from the merchant oligarchy to the labouring poor. If the order represented in these texts better reflected an ideal rather than the reality, it also provided a recognised model of civic governance to which even the unfranchised labouring poor of Norwich could in principle appeal to legitimate and represent their interests. Their ability to exploit this language of legalism was in part a consequence of the social capital invested in the city's civic traditions strengthening localised customary institutions.

In querying why, in certain regions of Italy, democratic institutions founder, yet prosper elsewhere, Robert Putnam found that success or failure was often related to the availability of "a historical repertoire of forms of collaboration that, having proved their worth in the past, are available to citizens for addressing new problems of collective action."¹⁰⁸ Such an institutional culture thrived on generalised forms of social reciprocity. The openness and vigour of Norwich's representative institutions nurtured a civic culture capable of sustaining these kinds of social exchange, even amongst those who might not themselves be franchised citizens, and developed the confidence to claim sufficient authority to arbitrate, albeit through informal channels, on such matters.

¹⁰⁷ Blomefield, *Norwich*, pp.132-7

¹⁰⁸ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, 1993), p.173

The historical narratives of Norwich's political constitution concomitantly described the rights and liberties of the citizenry, iterating ideas about how they should be governed. The economic requirement of maintaining an urban identity strong enough to fashion its population into a civic community meant that notions of the city, and crucially the citizenry, became increasingly open. In this sense the openness of Norwich's institutional culture of political representation, if not offering universal suffrage, helped engender a sense of the commons which extended even beyond the middling sort, as described by Withington, to incorporate its labouring poor. The lower orders of Norwich's civic society, who were less likely to be freemen and either possess the franchise or occupy even the most modest of civic offices, were still capable, by extension of a political vernacular of citizenship, to engage with questions of how they were to be governed.

CHAPTER THREE – Civic Governance and Citizenship

1. Outline

In the previous chapter we examined how the relative openness of Norwich's civic culture, and the extent to which the populace were engaged with its representative political system, contributed to a political vernacular based on ideas of citizenship, yet accessible to even the unenfranchised labouring poor.

Michael Walzer has shown how the classical conception of citizenship, expressed by Aristotle and Cicero, although continuing to be defined by the rhetoric of the active life parted ways with political and legal realities.¹ Throughout the medieval period the idea of the citizen was predominantly of "someone protected by the law [rather] than someone who made and executed the law."² This passive sense of citizenship was never dispelled, but the absolutist ambitions of early modern states led to the deliberate promotion of the active, classical sense of the citizen as office holder.

In principle these offices had been considered the preserve of the wealthiest and most influential men of their neighbourhoods, who were able to use their social status within their locality to consolidate the process of government.

Those with insufficient private wealth could not be trusted to act for the public good... Officeholders were empowered as much by their status as by their formal powers – their capacity to govern was a product of both social and legal

¹ Michael Walzer, 'Citizenship', in Ball, Farr and Hanson (ed.), Political innovation and conceptual change (Cambridge, 1989), p.214

² Ibid., p.215

authority. Discretion was expected of them, but this also gave room to suspicions of corruption and self-service.³

Norwich's officers were selected from the freemen of the city. In addition to providing voting rights in the city's elections the freedom afforded the liberty to trade in the city. In principle this meant that the senior representative offices – its aldermen and sheriffs – would represent the wealthiest and most powerful members of the merchant-manufacturing elite. In practice however, the growing role of middlemen and agents meant that many of the city's *pseudo-gentry* did not personally require the freedom, with their interests managed by suitably qualified men. Allied to this actuality was the fact that social and economic mobility and inflation combined to create a large freeman population, of whom few fulfilled the kind of social requirements of classical notions for its governors. At the turn of the century the corporation lobbied Parliament for the statutory powers to bring in more men from the textile trades, in order to rectify this problem. The principal consideration was not to further expand the electorate, but to devise the means to bring in men of sufficient status and wealth to assume a prominent position in the city.

But, aside from the senior representative offices of the corporation, we have observed that it was possible for men of a middling station to find in this model of active citizenship the basis of a much more inclusive political culture.⁴ This culture of citizenship extended even beyond the petty office holders of the parish, and could embrace freemen, and the parochial rate payers. Many of these people were of no more than middling status, and in spite of their growing contribution to the wealth of the city their economic influence was

³ Braddick, *State formation*, p.82

⁴ See ch.2

not necessarily matched by their political influence. The growing middling rank of tradesmen and professionals who paid into the system of parochial rates consequently felt that they were entitled to a say in the disposal of their property, particularly as municipal expenditure increased. Daniel Defoe, writing pseudonymously as Andrew Moreton, complained that parish rates were excessive, and expended wastefully, but that the imposition of petty offices was little more than a punishment, "an insupportable Hardship; it takes up so much of a Man's time, that his own affairs are neglected, too often to his Ruin".⁵

However in the face of social and political uncertainties regarding the extent of populist influence on the stability of civic order within the corporation, the period following the Hanoverian succession witnesses a progressive shift in the way that the business and jurisdictions of the municipal institutions were defined. By restricting and specialising the roles of its representative bodies they became much more regular and readily amenable to a legal-rational model of government. The partial remodelling of the administration of the corporation's institutions was in part motivated and supported by anti-populist political initiatives by the state to reduce the influence of the city's large and frequently unruly electorate. But it also reflected the more general anxieties of the civic elite about social order. The changes contributed to a process which Corfield identified as socially oligarchical, by concentrating power in the hands of a narrowly defined civic elite, to a far greater extent than had been the case in the previous century.⁶

⁵ Andrew Moreton [Daniel Defoe], Parochial Tyranny (London, 1727), pp.16-7

⁶ Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.232-4

2. The relevance of the freedom

For the inhabitants of Norwich citizenship was strictly speaking conferred only by becoming a freeman of the city. The privileges and liberties of the freeman were traditionally necessary to practice one's trade within the city's jurisdiction, as well as granting the right to vote for the city's corporate offices and parliamentary representatives. As we have seen, the social mobility of the period meant that many lesser tradesmen and professionals were becoming more significant to the commercial wellbeing of the city, and also became more visible in its political affairs.

However there was, by the end of the seventeenth-century, a perception that the freedom was an institution in decline. The freemen comprised a less socially select body than the burgesses of old had, and prompted corporate measures to redress this situation. However, any assertions by modern historians that by this time the freedom served solely as "a form of political property rather than a licence to trade" are somewhat overstated.⁷

As a county town and centre of regional trade, as well as a manufacturing city, Norwich was home to a range of merchants, tradesmen and retailers who were willing to appeal to the freeman restrictions in order to defend their commercial position from competitors. In response to petitioning by city tradesmen against pedlars and hawkers in 1710 the restrictions on non-citizens trading were reaffirmed by the corporation, else "the City will be so pestered with inmates and superfluous multitudes of people as the government will be more burdensome than before, and the City itself likely to be exposed by that means to the danger of the pestilence and contagious diseases."⁸

⁷ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People* (Oxford, 1989), p.182

⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16c/7, Assembly Waste Book, 3rd May 1710, ff.186-7

To qualify as a freeman one had to prove either that one's father had been free, or that one had completed their apprenticeship with a Norwich freeman. Those who did not fulfil these criteria or foreigners, meaning those who came from outside of the city, could acquire their freedom by paying a fine. However it was never expected nor desired that all would take up the freedom, with the greater part of labourers and journeymen, who might have qualified through serving an apprenticeship, neglecting to do so. Although women were in principle able to practice a trade or be apprenticed, they were not entitled to take the freedom.⁹ Rather, it was more closely associated with those propertied men involved in trade and manufacturing, who required the freedom in order to carry out their business.

When the prosperous merchant John Gurney presented himself to gain his freedom he was unable, as a Quaker, to swear his oath, and it was only a special dispensation by the Company of Cordwainers which allowed him to practice his trade in the city, although the other privileges were not granted.¹⁰ In 1721 Gurney was one of several prominent Quakers who used their influence to secure the passage of the Affirmation Bill through Parliament. The Affirmation Act secured the Quaker's rights to affirm, rather than swear, an oath, which was not universally recognised as legally admissible.¹¹ Although still disqualified from political office, the act safeguarded their rights to sue in court and to vote, which had been effectively disallowed by a series of judgements.¹² The failure of many in the Norwich trades to take up their freedom may, in part,

⁹ Percy Millican, The Register of the Freemen of Norwich 1548-1713 (Norwich, 1934), pp.xiv-xv

¹⁰ Daniel Gurney, The Record of the House of Gournay pt.II (London, 1848), p.549

¹¹ 8 Geo.I c.6

¹² Mrs. Godfrey Locker-Lampson (ed.), A Quaker Post-Bag (London, 1910), p.104-7; Charles F. Mullett, 'The Legal Position of English Protestant Dissenters', Virginia Law Review 23:4 (Feb. 1937), pp.406-8

have been a reaction to the restrictions placed on dissenters by the Clarendon code, and causing many to retreat into quietism. However it also reflected the declining relevance of the freedom as necessary to trade in the city.

The nature of the national market, coupled to practical changes to marketing, such as the growth of middlemen, meant that the ways in which the freedom was defined and policed was progressively out-of-step with the economic realities of business. Historically the means to enforce the freedom had been via the trading companies of the city. However the falling number of admissions has to be taken as an indication of their diminishing ability to regulate of their trades. Restrictive guild practices inherited from the late medieval period and invested in the chartered rights and ancient legal privileges of the city, were ill-suited to the scale of the emerging national markets. The Weavers' Company struggled in the 1690s to retain its rights to search and seal, and Parliament ruled against them in a dispute with the woolcombers over their rights to inspect the standard of yarn.¹³ However the relative weakness of Norwich's manufacturing companies made them more willing to adapt to changing economic demands.¹⁴

The Norwich companies and craft guilds possessed neither the kind of stock nor the prestige of the London livery companies. Their authority was subordinated to the civic corporation, and resultantly they were more generally concerned with marrying the maintenance of social order with the needs of the city's prominent merchant-manufacturers.¹⁵ In 1705 the Sealers' Hall, where the authorities checked the cloth and sealed it to leave the city, was broken into and its books destroyed. However the practice and its institutional

¹³ Corfield, 'A provincial capital', p.284

¹⁴ Ibid., p.295; Evans, 'The Decline of Oligarchy', p.76

¹⁵ George Unwin, Industrial Organization in the 16th and 17th Centuries (London, 1957) pp.96-7; Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1548-1713, p.xii

setting had by this time been so far eroded that it was simply not renewed.¹⁶ Although the Mayor's Court books of the early eighteenth-century still noted the annual appointment of the wardens and officers to the Worsted Weavers' Company, there is little mention of their orders, and the last recorded election of officials took place in 1727.¹⁷

Other city companies continued to play a more active role in regulating their trades, where it supported the day-to-day process of civic administration. Indeed there was even a new Trade Company for the city's Musicians instituted in 1714.¹⁸ In 1725 the Bakers' Company agreed with the corporation to renew and maintain their regulations, and they were subsequently empowered by the city to search for poor quality bread which had been adulterated.¹⁹ However the historical weakness of the trades meant that they had been less active enforcing take-up of the freedom, and such initiatives generally fell to the corporation.

In the seventeenth-century the increasing vitality of the textile industry had led to an ever greater number of apprentices from prosperous, well-established families as worsted weavers, and, although all were expected to become freemen in turn, this was frequently not the case.²⁰ An attempt in 1701 to rectify the situation, by obtaining an act of Parliament "to bring in p[er]sons tradeing in this city not being free", was unsuccessful, as an earlier effort in 1677 had been, but focused attention on the issue.²¹ A campaign threatening prosecution against those involved in the textile industry who were practising their trade without having

¹⁶ Corfield, 'A provincial capital', pp.283-4

¹⁷ Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, p.87

¹⁸ Webb and Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2, p.538

¹⁹ Corfield, Social and Economic History, p.107

²⁰ Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich, pp.47-50

²¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayors Court Book, 1st Feb. 1700/1 to 21st May 1701, ff.99-105; Corfield, 'A provincial capital', p.274

taken the freedom prompted an increase in admissions, but the effects were only temporary.

Many men simply found it unnecessary to take the freedom because of the way that their business interests were managed, and so, in spite of their wealth and influence, they played little part in the formal aspects of corporate life. At the 1705 parliamentary election one of the Whig candidates faced criticism from his Tory opponents, on the basis that he was just one of a number of wealthy manufacturers who had never taken up their freedom (although a freeholder). Such men evinced little sense of commitment to the public interest and “have been the means of discouraging others from it to avoid the troublesome and chargeable offices belonging to such who are obliged to be freemen.”²² The Tories appealed to the city’s bylaws to discredit the Whig candidates’ legal right to represent the city, as they were freeholders and not freemen, choosing to construe citizenship narrowly as applying to freemen exclusively.²³

Consequently the 1723 act obtained by the corporation was the culmination of its efforts to bring up-to-date the laws, originally passed in the sixteenth-century, making citizenship obligatory for all branches of the textile trade.²⁴ Of central importance to these measures was the bringing in of many of the city’s better established manufacturers and traders who had not taken the freedom up to then, and qualifying them to serve as corporate offices if called on. The act stipulated that all resident “makers of stuffs, or makers of wool into yarn, master weavers, or master woolcombers, or dealers, or traders as such, or employing servants

²² ‘The Case of the City of Norwich, in Parliament for Mr Blofield and Mr Palgrave, against Mr Bacon and Mr Chambers, upon a Double Return made by the Sheriffs of Norwich at the last Election for Parliament Men’ [1705] quoted in Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, pp.570-1

²³ Ibid., p.386

²⁴ 9 Geo.I c.9

or workmen in any such manufactures, or having any interest, stock, share or partnership therein" should appear at the Courts of Mayoralty or Assembly by the 24th of June that year to pay their fines and be made a freeman. Thereafter anyone exercising their trade in woollen stuffs without being free could be fined £10 for each month they traded without qualification.

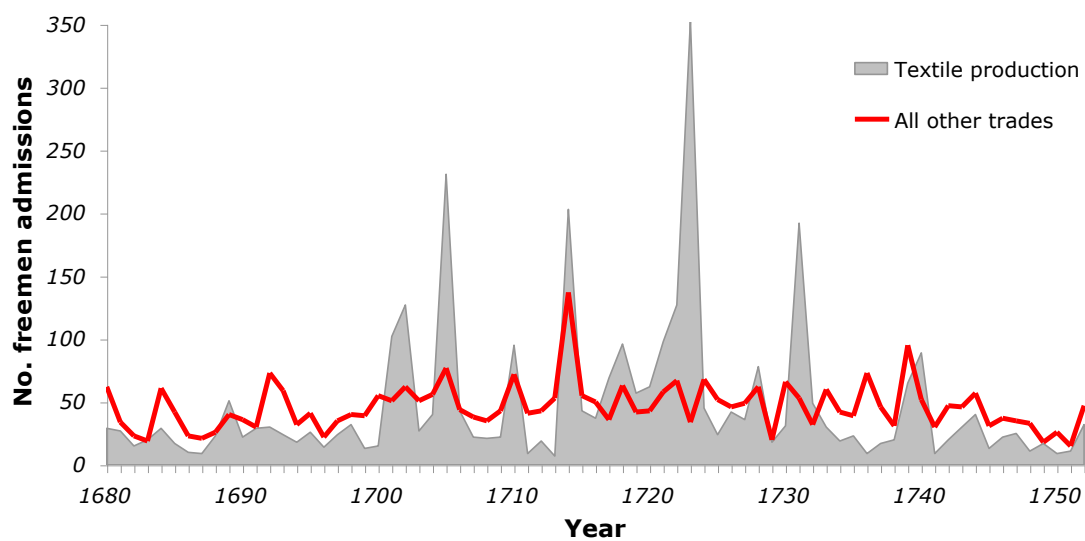
The effect was immediate, with freeman admissions from the textile trades increasing dramatically. In 1723 a total of 387 freemen were admitted for the year, of whom 353 (91%) were listed as practising one of the main textile manufacturing trades of dyer, hotpresser, twisterer, woolcomber or weaver.²⁵ Writing a decade later Benjamin Mackerell could assert that "scarce one Magistrate has been chosen but such as were made free by virtue of this late Act of Parliament".²⁶

Although those taking the freedom were particularly numerous for 1723, after the act was passed, the previous two years also show higher than average figures, with 737 men in total taking the freedom in the years 1721-3, of whom 571 (77.5%) worked in textile production. However, in spite of the effort in obtaining the bill, after 1723 the number of freemen dropped off again, so that in the next five years, 1724-8, a total of 502 freemen were sworn, with 223 of them, or 44.4% of the total, textile producers (Fig.1).

²⁵ Percy Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1714-1752 (Norwich, 1952)

²⁶ Benjamin Mackerell, 'Account of the Company of St George in Norwich', Norfolk Archaeology 3 (1852), p.366

Fig.1 Freemen admitted annually 1680-1752²⁷



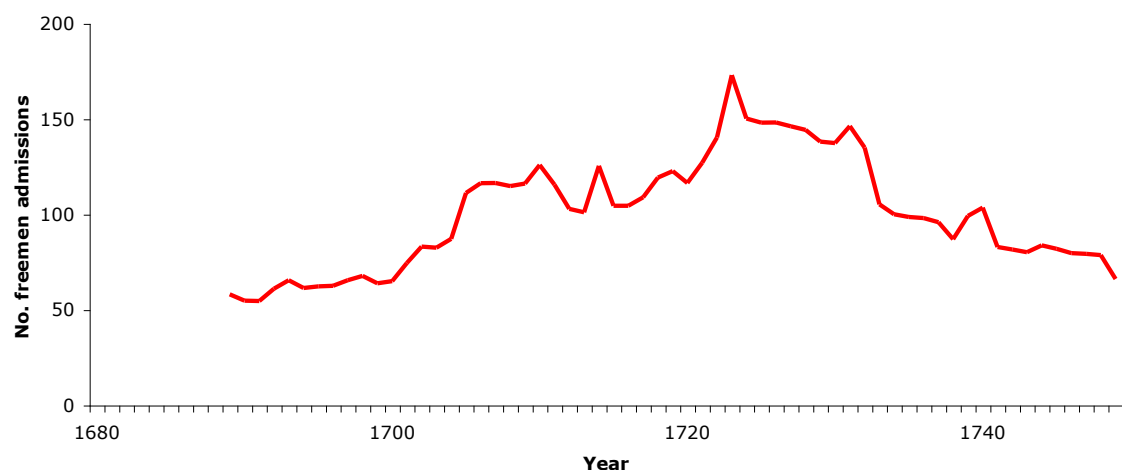
Looking at the figures for freemen sworn between 1680 and 1752 there is no stable trend easily discernible. Admissions fluctuated, with the peaks coinciding with periods of enforcement, when it was foremost in the minds of the corporation and city, as in the cases of 1701-2, 1721-3 and 1741, when the Assembly imposed further restrictions on foreigners trading in the city. Other peaks correspond to events marked by periods of increased party mobilisation, and appear even more briefly, as for example in the case of the years 1705, 1710, 1714, 1728 and 1731.

Take-up of the freedom was generally limited to those who had an economic interest in doing so, as they were involved in the commercial side of the trade. However because of the structure of the textile industry, which favoured the division of labour by putting out work to smaller workshops, there were a large number of small masters who were effectively little more than waged artisans

²⁷ Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1548-1713; Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1714-1752. I have used 'textile trades' here to narrowly denote only those trades concerned with the manufacturing process which were most frequently subscribed to by freemen: dyers, hotpressers, twisterers, woolcombers and weavers.

themselves, yet possessed the freedom.²⁸ The problem of freedoms being bought in order to engineer elections became a cause for concern, with marked increases in people acquiring the freedom immediately before elections. Before the 1702 parliamentary election up to 231 new freemen were created, and 341 were sworn before the 1714 election, prompting an investigation by a committee of the Mayor's Court.²⁹ The issue in these cases was not just one of electoral manipulation and factionalism, but also the admission *en masse* of a section of the city's labouring poor, and which the Elections Act of 1729 attempted to curtail.³⁰

Fig.2 Moving 10-year average for freemen admissions (1680-1749)



Although after 1723 the numbers becoming freemen swiftly dropped off, and thereafter was marked by only infrequent and spasmodic activity, the response to the campaigns of enforcement proved highly effective in boosting freeman numbers. Before 1700, and after 1741, the number of freemen sworn was generally lower.

²⁸ Eric Kerridge, Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England (Manchester, 1985), p.201

²⁹ Knights, 'Politics, 1660-1835'; Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/27, Mayors Court Book, 23rd Oct. 1714, f.170

³⁰ 3 Geo.II c.8

This picture is made clearer by looking at a moving ten-year average, which helps flatten out the peaks and troughs, and shows two upswings in figures; firstly around 1700, and then after 1715, peaking in 1723 and then declining reasonably steadily, only dropping to pre-1700 levels of admissions in the 1740s (Fig.2).³¹

In other words, the picture told by these figures is not one of steadily declining freeman admissions in the first half of the century, faced with the inevitable expansion of the national market and forces of economic liberalisation, rendering restrictive practices obsolete. Rather it shows their responsiveness to intermittent corporate strategies for enforcing trade privileges, and to political events mobilising public support. The commercial and financial changes which occurred in this period overlapped with the continuance of other established measures like the role of civic freedoms, but also with the magistrates' control of marketing and the provision for the poor of the city, and which was consistent with the persistence of interventionist strategies of governance.³²

3. Citizenship and office holding

The idea of active citizenship was an important component of the working life of the city, with office holding forming an integral part of the practical process of its government and administration. The emphasis on office holding had been intrinsic to the ideas of civic republicanism which emerged in the early modern period, drawing on the development of renaissance humanist discourse.

³¹ Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1548-1713; Millican, Freemen of Norwich 1714-1752

³² Polanyi, The Great Transformation, p.71; Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, pp.89-90

Recent historical scholarship by Peltonen and Withington has emphasised the continuity of a body of civic humanist ideas which provided sixteenth-century England with a strongly defined sense of citizenship and public virtue, and lasted well into the seventeenth-century.³³ Although, in the seventeenth-century, some contemporaries treated the Ciceronian idea of the active life instilling virtue as the preserve of the nobility, others engaged with a more inclusive sense of citizenship, which would foster a virtuous citizenry and commonwealth.³⁴

In spite of the growth of the state in this period, civic offices were still largely voluntary, and local government was principally vested in the hands of a non-professionalised class of officers, great and small. Public offices were entrusted to what were, in effect, private men. In actuality, the financial resources of Norwich's city corporation had never been extensive, so that where the corporation was unable to cover its expenses out of its own stock, the financial obligation had fallen to its burgesses, and by the eighteenth-century was communicated to its ratepayers.³⁵ The chamberlain's treasury accounts for the city indicate that several of the aldermen made substantial loans to the corporation's stock, with Robert Britiffe, Philip Meadows and John Black all receiving annuities from the corporation on sums of more than a thousand pounds.³⁶ The affairs of the corporation and its chief office-holders were easily entangled, for as well as their balancing the city's stock, the annuities provided the aldermen concerned with a secured income on their loans.

The Mayor received a sum of £100 annually to cover his costs, but this was intended to be put towards a range of civic entertainments

³³ Markku Peltonen, Classical Humanism in English Political Thought (Cambridge, 2004); Withington, The Politics of Commonwealth

³⁴ Peltonen, Classical Humanism, pp.172-7

³⁵ Maitland, Township and Borough, p.32

³⁶ Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A, folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich vol.II

and other costs of office, which it would not have been sufficient to cover. Similarly the Sheriffs received £50 *per annum* between both of them, although an estimate produced in the first half of the century estimated their annual expense to be not less than £144, if they conducted themselves frugally.³⁷ The costs of office could be significant, and when an allowance, considered customary to the role, was not dispensed to the Sheriffs in 1708 they were eventually forced to go to the Court of Exchequer to sue for financial redress.³⁸ The responsibility of freemen to be open to assume corporate offices necessitated that they be men of some means and understanding, so that the freedom was based on

an explicit trade-off... between gaining the advantages of the freedom and being able and willing to pay taxes, participate in town government, and subject oneself and one's property to the town's courts.³⁹

In order to discover and nominate suitable candidates amongst the freemen for the position of sheriff, the Mayor's Court appointed by a committee to shortlist men whose wealth and station was considered sufficient to the post. From the beginning of the century, however, there were periodic concerns regarding a lack of suitable freemen, denying them sufficient men of property to serve as city officers.⁴⁰ It was with this specific purpose in mind that the corporation attempted to secure an act of Parliament in 1701, and less with increasing the number of freemen in general. The petition to Parliament drawn up by the Assembly in 1701 clearly emphasised

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ TNA, Exchequer Depositions taken by Commission E 134/12 Anne/Mich 14, 4th Sep. 1713

³⁹ Jonathan Barry, 'Civility and Civic Culture in Early Modern England', in Burke, Harrison and Slack (ed.), *Civil Histories* (Oxford, 2000), p.189

⁴⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayors Court Book, 1st Feb. 1700/1, f.99; Corfield, 'A provincial capital', p.274

this aspect. Its purpose was specifically to bring in men involved in the trade, as "Offices have fallen upon persons of meane Condi[ti]on which have already proved ruinous to some will be so to many others for the future".⁴¹

The corporation's petitions to the Crown and the high offices of state were couched in the terminology of social degree, invariably addressed from the corporation and 'Principal Inhabitants' of the city. In spite of notional commitments to corporative inclusion and commonwealth, the interests of the corporation were in large part considered identical to those of the wealthiest and most influential part of the civilian populace, and in particular the city's merchant-manufacturing interest.⁴² Prior to the Elizabethan revival of the worsted trade there had been minimal representation of the textile trades in the city's government, but a little over a century later half of all aldermen and a third of the common council practised the trade, with taxation records reflecting the growing wealth and dominance of the Norwich manufactory.⁴³

However the demands of civic office were such that it demanded a level of personal commitment. When John Pell was absent from the city for several years, the Court of Mayoralty issued a summons, delivered to him in person in London, to return and take up his duties to the corporation.⁴⁴ The difficulties of balancing civic office with other commercial or personal responsibilities encouraged many to pay the fine to be exempted. At the beginning of the eighteenth-century the fines discharging someone from serving as sheriff, could be significant, and were generally levied in accordance to the citizen's ability to pay. The sum fixed by the court for John Russell,

⁴¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16c/7, Assembly Waste Book, 24th Feb. 1700/1, f.122

⁴² Corfield, 'A provincial capital', pp.276-7

⁴³ Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich, p.64; Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.229-30; D.S. O'Sullivan, Politics in Norwich, 1701-1835 (University of East Anglia, 1975), pp.51-3

⁴⁴ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 5th July 1746, f.3

a draper, was £100 not to serve the office.⁴⁵ After the 1723 Act was passed it was stipulated that for anyone elected as Sheriff with material assets of less than two thousand pounds they should pay a fine of up to £50 to be exempted, but if their assets were greater they could pay up to £80.⁴⁶

The fines paid by wealthy non-conformists, to be exempted from taking an office they could not legally perform, had become a recognised means for corporations to raise funds, and in some cases a method of religious persecution. Obstacles to office for dissenters included the terms of the Corporation Act, which demanded that such men conform by taking "the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the rites of the Church of England" at least annually.⁴⁷ The questions raised regarding the practice of occasional conformity, which saw some taking the sacrament just once annually whilst remaining active members of dissenting fellowships, became a signal political issue during the reign of Queen Anne and a source of serious strife with the Saccheverell case in 1710, polarising the political nation.

If the intent had been to drive all non-conforming dissenters from public office it was unsuccessful, as the Whigs simply encouraged them to abstain temporarily from public worship, until the Hanoverian successors to the throne rectified their legal situation.⁴⁸ Subsequent amendments to the laws made some progress towards greater toleration, although in practice it did not offer a failsafe for dissenters taking political office, and a number simply withdrew.⁴⁹ In spite of such obstacles there were a significant number of magistrates and corporate officers in Norwich who came from a

⁴⁵ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayor's Court Book, 28th June 1700, f.85

⁴⁶ Norf. RO, MS 453, T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

⁴⁷ 13 Car.II st.2 c.1

⁴⁸ Michael R. Watts, The Dissenters vol.1 (Oxford, 1978), p.266

⁴⁹ 1 Geo.II st.2 c.23; Norma Landau, The Justices of the Peace (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), pp.324-5

non-conformist background, and a number who, although fully conforming members of the Church of England, retained kinship ties, associational bonds and business partnerships with active members of the dissenting communities.⁵⁰

By the end of the seventeenth-century the increased wealth and social status of a number of professionals was notable, providing evidence of the changing pattern of occupational influence. However some of the duties which might have been expected to fall to its 'Principal Inhabitants' were becoming the responsibility of men of rather more modest station.⁵¹ Phil Withington has demonstrated how in the seventeenth-century the practical extension of office holding to a broader social range contributed to creating a much more inclusive sense of citizenship. The practicalities of day-to-day processes of governance in the city, in which the city commonwealth functioned as a "palimpsest of semi-autonomous bodies", meant that many men of only 'middling' status were required to carry out public offices.⁵² The nature of these offices reflected the multiple jurisdictions which operated in the city, with parochial and corporate forms of administration overlapping.

The emphasis on civic office holding, smaller as well as greater, encouraged public involvement beyond the civic elite, and crucially, the increasing wealth of many smaller merchants, tradesmen, and master manufacturers meant that they contributed a significant portion of the city's rates.⁵³

⁵⁰ Guth, Croakers, Tackers, and other Citizens, p.783; O'Sullivan, Politics in Norwich, p.221

⁵¹ Webb and Webb, The Development of English Local Government, pp.14-5

⁵² Withington, The Politics of Commonwealth, p.97

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.68

3. The administration of the city

For practical purposes most of the processes of day-to-day municipal government was managed through the various courts, which provided a public stage on which the officers of the corporation could engage with inhabitants of the city. The structure and form of the courts provided a set of formal processes which helped to regulate the administration of these various exchanges. The two principal courts of the city were the Mayor's Court and the Court of Common Council, both of which were occupied by the range of senior representative offices elected by the citizenry. At a ward and parochial level the constables, as well as the parochial overseers and churchwardens were responsible for a certain level of administration, most notably in the provision of poor relief and the levying and valuation of the poor rates, but ultimately they answered to the city. The subordination of the parishes to the city corporation meant there is little documentary evidence in our period of the kind of activist governance over their neighbourhoods that characterised the involvement of the middling sorts in local office holding elsewhere in the seventeenth-century.⁵⁴

At the top of the arrangement of these local offices were the Mayor and aldermen. The twenty four aldermen were elected to represent a ward of the city by its freemen, two to each ward, and in principle served as "intermediaries between the central authority and the smaller administrative divisions", with the wards' business dealt with collectively in the Mayor's Court.⁵⁵ Aldermen were elected for life, unless permitted to resign their position or stripped of the office for violation of their code of conduct. Daniel Meadows was required, by reason of his commercial interests, to spend most of his time in London, so was granted leave in April 1724 to resign his position on

⁵⁴ Hindle, *The State and Social Change*, pp.204-30

⁵⁵ Hudson and Tingey, *Records of the City of Norwich*, vol.1, p.cv

payment of a fine.⁵⁶ Richard Mott, having previously served as Mayor in 1718, was permitted in 1727 to resign his position as an alderman when his commercial fortunes declined, and requested he resign from an office he could “no long[e]r support himself in without detriment to himself, and the disgust of many of his Fellow-Citizens”.⁵⁷

The Mayor was elected annually from the aldermen, and his role was to serve as chief magistrate for the city, with the legal powers to maintain peace and good order.⁵⁸ In this respect the lesser corporate offices of the Clerks of the Market and the city’s ward constables were considered to answer directly to the Mayor in policing the city. Periodic campaigns of enforcement were implemented by the Mayor’s Court in response to general concerns regarding particular issues, and showed a greater willingness to bring prosecutions for forestalling or selling by false weights and measures during periods of dearth or marked by rising prices of victuals. Similar campaigns were marked a spate of prosecutions in the court for running disorderly alehouses, and sometimes coincided with other measures regulating the market if they feared there was a general risk of disorder.⁵⁹

Once an alderman had served a term as Mayor they retained their powers as a Justice of Peace for the whole city. Consequently the Mayor’s Court was also entitled to try common law offences as a petty sessions court, in addition to dealing with the regulation of the market and resolving public nuisances. In the seventeenth-century the court dealt with a broad range of cases, similar to those taken to the city’s Quarter Sessions.⁶⁰ However this situation changed in

⁵⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/28, Mayor’s Court Book, 18th Apr. 1724, f.191

⁵⁷ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, *Acta Norviciensa* vol.I, p.101

⁵⁸ Hudson and Tingey, *Records of the City of Norwich, vol.1*, p.cvii

⁵⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/29, Mayor’s Court Book, 22nd Aug. 1733 to 6th Feb. 1733/4, ff.180-95

⁶⁰ Evans, *17th Century Norwich*, p.59

the opening decades of the eighteenth-century, and offences were referred directly to the Quarter Sessions to be tried. Although the aldermen 'past the chair' also presided there as Justices of the Peace, there was evidently a deliberate effort to render the business and jurisdictions of the various institutions of the city more distinct.

In addition to being a Justice of the Peace, the Mayor was also the returning officer for the corporation, and wielded considerable influence in directing the course and outcome of elections. This was particularly so given Norwich's political culture, which saw municipal, as well as parliamentary, elections frequently and vigorously contested. Requests for an investigation and recount for a 1723 aldermanic election, in which the Whigs had manipulated the votes of the Hospitallers and prisoners, was denied on the basis it would compromise the electors' rights.⁶¹ Similarly, in the case of the 1705 election for an alderman which has been previously detailed, the Mayor's Court did not order an election until more than six months after the previous incumbent had died, and subsequently annulled the results of the first election, ruling the Whig candidate unfit for office and rescheduling the election.⁶² The Mayor's Court ruled that although the freemen of the ward could nominate the candidate, the charters of the city placed the final decision in choosing with the court. They instead installed his Tory opponent as alderman, bypassing the freeman vote and provoking popular consternation, until their interpretation was overturned by a writ of mandamus.⁶³

The freemen of the city elected the Mayor annually from the ranks of the aldermen, and the occasion of his election in May and his swearing office on the city's Guild day in June were both significant

⁶¹ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, *Acta Norviciensa* vol.I, p.47

⁶² See Introduction. TNA, Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, SP 34/6/25A, Order of the court of aldermen of Norwich, 22nd Mar. 1704/5

⁶³ Prideaux, *Letters*, pp.195-6; Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

public events in Norwich's civic calendar. Celia Fiennes described the civic ceremony for the swearing in of the Mayor,

all in the streete in which this major elects house is very exact in beautifying themselves and hanging up flaggs the coullours of their Companyes and dress up pageants and there are playes and all sorts of shows that day... then they have a great feast with fine flaggs and scenes hung out, musick and dancing...⁶⁴

It became usual in the opening decades of the century for the new Mayor to issue a notice of intent after he was sworn into office for the year, against gaming in public houses, throwing at cocks and other disorders, and empowering civic offices on the authority of the Mayor's Court to enter premises to enforce the law. Publication of the court's orders and proclamations was made in the local press once it became established, but also continued to be published about the streets by the city's bellman. As the Crown's Justices of the Peace, the Mayor's Court provided a point of contact with the national authorities, and was the channel to ensure that the statutes were implemented and state proclamations made public.

The policing of prices for staples and fuel remained one of the central regulatory mechanisms of municipal governance, and provided continuity with the medieval practice of the assize, which fixed weights and prices to restrain the inflation of prices and ensure provisions were available in times of scarcity. It fell to the Mayor's Court to set and issue the assize of bread, although the process of monitoring prices was carried out by the committees of the city Assembly. A similar concern with supplying and regulating the essentials of life was raised in disputes with Great Yarmouth,

⁶⁴ Fiennes, *Journeys*, p.179

which was monopolising the importation of coal, fearing it would inflate prices and create shortages among the labouring poor of the city.

The Common Council consisted of sixty councillors, elected by the freemen of the wards to represent them for the year. Combined with the Mayor's Court and the two Sheriffs for the city they made up the city's Assembly, which, in terms of municipal business, was the more politically significant body, even if it lacked the judicial powers and ceremonial authority of the Mayor's Court.⁶⁵ Much of the work in reporting and drafting on specific matters was handed off to a number of its members in committee, before being passed by the whole body. Principally the Assembly acted as the city's legislative body, responsible for ratifying proposals which had been raised by the Mayor's Court in their role as the city's magistracy.⁶⁶ This was more than merely a rubber stamping process, as the common court was not always in agreement with the Mayor's Court. Although concord between the two bodies was necessary to the city's regular functioning relations occasionally broke down, when the interests of the aldermen found themselves at odds with the common council, as was the case on several occasions throughout the century.

In 1700 some of the more prominent merchants of the city petitioned the Mayor's Court to establish an exchange at the New Hall. The exchange aimed to provide a hub for the city's commercial correspondence which connected Norwich to the national market, and able to "knit Mankind together in a mutual Intercourse of good Offices".⁶⁷ The speech for the opening a similar exchange in Bristol praised the public worth of such projects,

⁶⁵ Webb and Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2, pp.539-41

⁶⁶ Evans, 17th Century Norwich, p.44

⁶⁷ Ross (ed.) Selections from the Tatler and the Spectator, p.439

calculated to promote that Harmony, Unanimity and social Intercourse which ought always to subsist among a Trading Free People, and to excite a noble Emulation in them of excelling each other in Industry, and extension of Commerce...⁶⁸

It was, as such, a self-conscious act of emulation, to both encourage and stimulate commerce in the city and draw it into expanding national financial networks. The business of the Exchange helped formalise transactions, creating a forum which offered some degree of public visibility and regularity to their business, which became particularly relevant with the expansion of trade to less tangible forms of mobile property. The Mayor's Court believed it would "be convenient for p[ro]moteing the trade of the city" and approved the scheme, passing it to the Assembly for approval.⁶⁹ The Common Court however voiced opposition to such a scheme, believing that it did not best serve the public benefit. Despite their opposition the plan for the Exchange was passed through the Assembly, but never managed to establish itself and was subsequently abandoned, following a petition complaining that it was damaging the city's trade.⁷⁰

Efforts to set up an Exchange for Norwich were made again in 1725, following receipt of a petition from a number of the principal tradesmen, and the New Hall was once more opened as an Exchange, but again the effort did not last.⁷¹ To some extent this was due to the Norwich's mercantile trade having maintained an export market for some considerable amount of time, with its own

⁶⁸ John Wood, *A Description of the Exchange of Bristol* (Bath, 1743), p.33

⁶⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayor's Court Book, 16th Nov. 1700, f.95

⁷⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16c/7, Assembly Waste Book, 16th Jan. 1701/2, f.128; Blomefield, *Norwich*, p.301

⁷¹ *NM*, 2nd Oct. 1725; *NM*, 9th Oct. 1725; Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, *Acta Norviciensa* vol.I, pp.63-4

settled practices. The later 1720s and 1730s was marked by a cluster of similar projects, initiated by the corporation, and justified in terms of the eighteenth-century commitment to improvement, which was becoming a commonplace of civic politics.⁷² Projects included the paving of the market place, the destruction of the market cross and Charing cross in 1732, and the widening of roads. The pattern of civic improvements was akin to those being undertaken in other cities and towns, to effect the "Neatness and Decency in her Publick Edifices."⁷³ With improvements undertaken as corporation projects, rather than being left to individual householders, it helped impose a greater uniformity on the appearance of towns, as well as creating lucrative forms of patronage for contractors to carry out the works.⁷⁴ However, such schemes also generated controversy when they affected livelihoods or weighed too heavily on the city's ratepayers.⁷⁵

The process of petitioning the Assembly or Mayor's Court represented the clearest way in which the government of the city can be seen to have been a two-way process between the citizenry and the civic authorities, allowing them to raise certain issues or requesting their support. Petitions followed a standard formula, which in most cases was no more than a short letter in which they represented their case, whether to resolve a legal matter, requesting an office or position, or for the rectification of a public nuisance. This method of addressing the city's governors was standardised and did not require extensive legal drafting, with many simply taking the form of an address or plea to the court.

⁷² Paul Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman (Oxford, 1991), p.211

⁷³ Wood, A Description of the Exchange of Bristol, p.25

⁷⁴ E.L. Jones and M.E. Falkus, 'Urban Improvement and the English Economy', in Peter Borsay (ed.), The Eighteenth-Century Town (London and New York, 1990), p.129

⁷⁵ Joanne Innes and Nicholas Rogers, 'Politics and Government 1700-1840', in Peter Clark (ed.), The Cambridge Urban History of Britain vol.II (Cambridge, 2000), p.541

Petitioning provided some representation for citizens' private interests, either singly or as part of a corporative body, as was the case with petitions by the city companies, tradesmen petitioning against chapmen and hawkers or by the inhabitants of a given parish.⁷⁶

It was the role of the Sheriffs' Court to police the implementation and discipline of the administration of municipal government, as well as overseeing the process of elections and appointment of juries at the city's Quarter Sessions. In order to be appointed an alderman it was expected that one should have first have served a term of office as a sheriff for the city. The business of the sheriffs' court and the presentments they drew up shows in much closer detail their business, in enforcing prosecution for nuisances, policing the collection of household waste, maintaining the highways, and regulating the market traders.⁷⁷ Most of the more mundane aspects of municipal administration were managed between the Sheriff's Court and the Assembly, as tasks like arranging for the clearing of the ditches or cleaning the cockeys and river were relegated from the Mayor's Court.

Like the Mayor the Sheriffs' powers enabled them to influence the course of elections and trials, and occasionally they were the subject of allegations of partiality in the use of their powers. Before the 1714 parliamentary election one of the Sheriffs was required to swear on oath before the Mayor's Court that "he was noe way concerned in the adviseing the Bell Man in makeing exclamacons about this City at severall places of a Reward to be given to such persons as will vote for Mr Barton & Mr Britiff at the next Elecon".⁷⁸ Consequently at elections it was most frequently the sheriffs who were the target of any unrest. After the sheriffs declared the 1728

⁷⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 12e, Petitions

⁷⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 5h/1, Presentments: St. Peter Mancroft

⁷⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/27, Mayors Court Book, 16th Oct. 1714, f.168

parliamentary election for the ministry's candidates vicious factional fighting broke out in the marketplace. The constables intervened, attempting to break up the tumult, and eventually the Riot Act was read aloud, causing some in the crowd to call out "Kill the Sheriffs, D--n 'em kill 'em, and then we shall get [th]e Election".⁷⁹

In the course of the early eighteenth-century, in contrast with the earlier period, it was becoming increasingly infrequent for the Mayor's Court to deal with the execution of justice, and few offenders came before them, so that by about the middle of the century the only cases were those dealt with on an emergency basis, where prompt sentencing was required in order to stay a riot. The creation of the Court of Conscience in 1702 represented a further case of petty claims being further removed from the pared down business of the Mayor's Court, and dealt with separately. Following the example of London, its stated aim was to reduce expensive litigation, ill-afforded by those involved, which threatened to reduce families to poverty, "filling the Prison with miserable Debtors, and creating great Charges to the several Parishes".⁸⁰ A single alderman presided over cases once-a-week, and further removed from the sort of business that seemed more appropriate for the court. This division of business, removing much of the active administration of city from the Mayor's Court, became more pronounced from the beginning of the century.

The principal business of the Mayor's Court increasingly lay in distributing bequests and trusts in their control as corporation loans, in the admissions to the freedom of the city, the management of hospital places to the aged and infirm of the city, and as distributors of largesse, as in the benefactions to the poor by the Lady Mayoress, or the sponsoring of poor boys and girls to go

⁷⁹ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, William Massey, Acta Norviciensa vol.I, p.92

⁸⁰ An Abstract of several Acts of Parliament (Norwich, 1713), p.14

out apprentices and learn a trade. The administration of such benefactions was an important component of corporate business and the greater part of its stock, in supporting the hospitals, with charitable bequests by the citizen elite of Norwich of monies and lands, whose rents provided material support, as well as contribute to the prestige of the offices, with gifts to the city of chains, maces and the paraphernalia of civic rule. The committees and courts formed to support the hospitals, although not formally part of the corporation, were reliant on many of the same men who occupied the loftiest corporate roles.

4. The administration of poor relief

Possibly the greatest source of contention at the heart of notions of civic governance lay in the administration of poor relief. The city Bridewell had been part of a programme of poor relief and social control which predated national legislation. In the sixteenth-century such measures by the corporation anticipated the formulation of the Elizabethan poor laws,

agreeved that the cittie was so replenysshed w[i]t[h] greate nombres, poore people bothe men, women and chyl dren... [who] wente dayely abroad from dore to dore counterfeattinge a kinde of worke but indeede dyd verie lyttle or none at all.⁸¹

In order to dissuade begging for alms from individual private householders, the authorities in Norwich instituted an integrated parochial system of poor relief which systematised payments to the

⁸¹ Rev. William Hudson and John Cottingham Tingey (ed.), The Records of the City of Norwich vol.II (Norwich, 1910), p.345

deserving poor, levying a charge against eligible householders, who in the 1570s numbered about nine hundred and fifty.⁸² The Elizabethan poor laws followed this example by setting the poor to work, and used the Privy Council's powers to enforce magisterial involvement with the poor, ensuring enactment of the assizes, and other remedial measures.⁸³ The implementation of the official corporate measures was, however, inconsistent, and many parishes were unable or unwilling to provide such resources, with Norwich's own provision after the 1580s only intermittent. Provision of the poor rates in many urban centres was frequently only reactive, levied in response to the threat of dearth.⁸⁴

In Norwich this system of corporate relief was reinforced by the seventeenth-century establishment of institutions such as the Boys' and Girls' Hospitals, maintained by private endowments, and administered through the corporation. Elsewhere the shift from individual acts of charity to an integrated corporate provision became closely linked in the seventeenth-century to protestant dissenters, as they made a conscious effort to carve out a niche for themselves in contemporary social life and corporate governance.⁸⁵ Margaret Pelling has shown that Norwich's medical relief initiatives of the 1620s, in reaction to poverty and population growth, were not exclusively associated with any religious or political faction, with both puritan and royalist aldermen active in their promotion. These efforts represented an earlier attempt by the city corporation to providing municipal provision for medical relief, which was

⁸² Pound, Tudor and Stuart Norwich, pp.143-7

⁸³ 43 Eliz.I, c.2

⁸⁴ Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor in the Eighteenth Century (London, 1926), p.125

⁸⁵ Ian Archer, 'The Charity of Early Modern Londoners', Royal Historical Society Transactions 6:12 (2002)

concentrated in the hands of the magistracy, working in concert with the parishes.⁸⁶

The early modern institutionalisation of relief had been accompanied by the imposition of a system of moral regulation, for policing the poor and putting them to work, with those who refused confined to the Bridewell. Similar concerns continued to inform the orders of the Mayor's Court in 1700 to the parochial overseers to withhold relief to those idle poor, who "are very remiss in observing the Lords Day and do spend their times loosely and idly and do not resort to their respective parish churches or to any other place of wor[shi]pp".⁸⁷

By the 1690s the rising costs to rate payers prompted widespread concerns about the cost and effectiveness of the system of poor relief. The 1662 Act of Settlement had been motivated by the concerns of property owners that numbers of incoming poor would swell parish rates, and correspondingly placed restrictions on their movement. The act provided the means to return the needy to their previous place of settlement if they proved unable to support themselves.⁸⁸ However the economic requirements of the economy meant there was always need for mobile labour, and with markets sensitive to upswings in trade they required a flexible workforce, so that preventative measures were employed discriminately, focusing mostly on families and women, and thereby reducing the risk of their being foisted on the parish. Critics of the existing laws, like Josiah Child and Matthew Hale, were dissatisfied with purely parochial responses, and showed that the failure to put the poor to

⁸⁶ Margaret Pelling, 'Healing the sick poor: Social policy and disability in Norwich 1550–1640', *Medical History* 29:2 (Apr. 1985), pp.136–7

⁸⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/26, Mayor's Court Book, 13th Nov. 1700, f.94

⁸⁸ 13/14 Car.II c.12

work was the result of the law's uneven application and the ill-suitedness of parochial overseers.⁸⁹

A period in which the national agenda, reflected in print and parliamentary debate, was to implement a more effective solution to managing their poor, culminated with the opening of the Bristol workhouse. The workhouse was an instrumental innovation which united Bristol's parishes for the purposes of providing a shared institution for housing and providing work for their poor.⁹⁰ It is tempting to see this phase of poor law policy as arising in isolation from the national authorities, but it has been shown that such localised initiatives as the first wave of workhouse construction were encouraged by Parliament, based on the Board of Trade's 1697 survey.⁹¹

Their report reiterated the view that the numbers of poor dependent on the parish or on begging were increasing as a result of a want of discipline and manners, rather than any shortage of work, and that this situation was compounded by the ignorance of the overseers. Proper relief of the poor lay in "finding work for them, and taking care they do not live like drones upon the labour of others... [and] is so well provided by the laws now in force that we can impute the continuance and increase of it to nothing but a general neglect of their execution."⁹² Their recommendation was that the city poor rates should be levied not by each parish individually, but by the corporation as a whole, which would have the means to put the needy to work.

⁸⁹ Josiah Child, A New Discourse of Trade (London, 1693), p.86; Sir Matthew Hale, 'A Discourse touching Provision for the Poor' in Works Moral and Religious, vol.1 (London, 1805), pp.523-25

⁹⁰ John Cary, An Account of the Proceedings of the Corporation at Bristol (London, 1700)

⁹¹ Innes, Inferior Politics, pp.33-4; H.R. Fox Bourne, The Life of John Locke vol.II (New York, 1876), pp.342-3, 376

⁹² Board of Trade report quoted in Fox Bourne, Life of John Locke vol.II, p.383

Daniel Defoe in *Alms no charity* argued against the provision for poor relief being assumed by the civic authorities as it threatened the stability of the national market. Such doubts about corporate responsibility for employing the poor were not unprecedented. John Graunt in his *Observations on the Bills of Mortality* cautioned “that if there be but a certain proportion of work to be done, and that the same be already done by the non-Beggars, then to imploy the Beggars about it, will but transfer the want from one hand to another”.⁹³ Defoe reasoned that the wealth of the nation had been growing since the time of Queen Elizabeth I, driven by the trade in its manufactures. However by erecting corporate factories for the poor and putting them to work, weaving or producing other consumer goods, it would disrupt the market. Were local corporations to use workhouses as the means to manufacture products they currently brought in from other parts of the kingdom then all levels of trade would suffer in consequence. Such an initiative unbalanced the trading relationships which had developed between different regional markets and producers, drawing them into national commerce and communication.

The manufactures of England are happily settled in different corners of the Kingdom, from which they are mutually convey'd by a circulation of trade to London by wholesale, like blood to the heart and from thence disperse in lesser quantities to the other parts of the Kingdom by retail... By this exchange of manufactures' abundance of trading families are maintain'd by the carriage and re-carriage of goods, vast number of men and cattle are employed, and number of inholders, victuallers, and their dependencies subsisted... This breach

⁹³ Capt. John Graunt, 'Natural and Political Observations', in William Petty, *Economic Writings* (Cambridge, 1899), pp.353-4

of the circulation of trade must necessarily distemper the body...⁹⁴

Such initiatives, by implication, would relapse into largely localised forms of economic subsistence, rendering towns and counties independent of each other, and ultimately reversing the momentum which drew the political nation together. The impositions of the Settlement Act and 'corporation-tyranny' on the industrious poor restricted the free movement of labour to take up work elsewhere, where demand created the need for more hands.⁹⁵ But with the 1722 statute for the more general implementation of workhouses, such *laissez-faire* economic objections were brushed aside and the necessity of providing work for the poor, in order to regulate the problems of poverty and disorder, were underlined.⁹⁶

The combination of John Cary's promotion of such corporate strategies through publication and the active encouragement of parliament for poor relief measures, by waiving the fees usual to private bills, led to the first wave of workhouse construction.⁹⁷ Reinforcing the desire to keep down the sums being levied for the parish rates were contemporary concerns which found expression in the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, and established a common cause uniting both the Anglican revival and dissenters, with Sir Humphrey Mackworth's 1704 reform bill gaining cross-party support in the Commons, although defeated in the House of Lords.⁹⁸ In the main, however, amongst the towns that obtained acts of

⁹⁴ Daniel Defoe, 'Giving Alms no Charity', in John R. McCulloch (ed.), A Select Collection of Scarce and Valuable Economical Tracts (New York, 1966), pp.46-7

⁹⁵ Daniel Defoe, The Best of Defoe's Review (New York, 1951), p.141

⁹⁶ Dorothy Marshall, The English Poor, p.47

⁹⁷ Cary, Proceedings of the Corporation at Bristol; Paul Slack, From Reformation to Improvement (Oxford, 1998), pp.110; Innes, Inferior Politics, pp.27-8; Sheila Lambert, Bills & Acts: Legislative Procedure in Eighteenth-Century England (Cambridge, 1971), pp.29-30

⁹⁸ Slack, Reformation to Improvement, pp.92, 111-4; Cruickshanks, Handley and Hayton, The House of Commons 1690-1715 vol.IV (Cambridge, 2002), pp.724-35

parliament for erecting their own municipal workhouses, although displaying varied religious or political motivations, the Whig-dissenting interest was prominent, in contrast to the Tory-dominated city corporation of Norwich in 1712.⁹⁹

Many contemporary country Tories suspected both the kind of financial and legal authority vested in such corporate bodies, as well as the effects of parochial unions weakening the settled interests of locality. These doubts were sufficient to dissuade many of them from associating with such bodies during the course of this phase of poor law reform. The reforms were not uncomplicated, and there were many who were dubious about both the constitutional legality and benefits of such a device. It represented both the creation of a new corporate body, engrossing existing parochial authority, as well as granting the new bodies additional powers, which were liable to accusations of arbitrariness, as evinced by the earlier opposition voiced to the Kings Lynn workhouse.

There all the authority for the disposal of the town's poor rate had been vested in the hands of the aldermen and common council, with no real transparency or powers of scrutiny given to rate payers. These guardians had not been directly elected by the rate payers to serve in this office, and furthermore any appeals against the rate assessments were to be directed to the borough quarter sessions, so that the same men would be responsible for ruling on the legitimacy of their own decisions. Similar disquiet was voiced at the possible abuse arising from their powers to commit any disorderly person for up to three years, "so any Gentleman or others, in Drink, or using unbecoming Language, &c. (tho' upon great Provocations) may be construed Offenders".¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Slack, Reformation to Improvement, pp.107-117

¹⁰⁰ Arguments against the Lynn Poor Bill (Kings Lynn, 1701); Several Objections Against the Lynn Poor Bill (Kings Lynn, 1701)

Norwich's magistracy, sheriffs and common council in assembly presented the initial petition for a workhouse to the House of Commons in December 1711. It argued that the number of poor in the city, "by reason of the War, Decay of Trade, and the Idleness of many People," was on the rise, requesting a bill for the foundation of a workhouse as the means to address the situation. Leave was granted and the members of parliament for the city, Richard Berney and Robert Bene, along with the Tory member for Great Yarmouth, Richard Ferrier, were assigned the job of drafting the bill.¹⁰¹ At its second reading a petition was presented on behalf of the owners of estates adjacent to the city, but falling under its jurisdiction, to argue that the imposition of a new corporation for the workhouse would impose monetary payments on them which might prove prejudicial to their own interests. A further petition in support of the bill, raised by the magistrates, sheriffs and grand jury for the Quarter Sessions for the city, underlining its benefits and the responsibility of all occupiers chargeable for its erection and maintenance, was read to the House of Commons and both petitions were forwarded for the committee's consideration. Subsequently the committee and the House of Lords made amendments before approving the bill, and it was finally given royal assent in May.¹⁰²

However the process of gaining legislative authority was only one aspect of establishing the workhouse, and there were further practical difficulties to its implementation after it was passed. This was most noticeable in their efforts to claim a bequest made in their interest from the estate's executor,¹⁰³ and, more significantly, in the difficulties of integrating the parishes and the laborious process of

¹⁰¹ Journals of the House of Commons vol.17 (London, 1803), pp.9, 10, 68

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.98, 114, 133, 160, 164, 234

¹⁰³ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/1, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor, 7th Oct. 1712

persuading the parochial overseers to surrender the poor money to the guardians of the workhouse.

Initially the Guardians of the workhouse had to make decisions about how best to proceed in their administration of the Act's implementation, and in setting up the workhouse as a corporate authority in its own right. Faced with a reluctance to recognise their jurisdiction, they drew on the authority of the city corporation, with each order of the workhouse court dispatched to the Mayor's court in order for a warrant to be raised for its execution.¹⁰⁴ The good functioning of the Workhouse Corporation depended heavily, at least at this stage, on the authority of the civic corporation, and seem to have been complementary and mutually beneficial, with a high degree of integration between their functions and, indeed, personnel.

Formally speaking it was determined that to be considered as a Guardian they should be property-holders, with no-one to be chosen but those rated at least 12d per week, or whose abode was worth £10 rent per annum. Those making voluntary contributions to the stock of the workhouse were also appointed guardians, having effectively bought an interest in it, and consequently it has been suggested that the corporation existed in practice as a public/private corporation.¹⁰⁵

The officers for the workhouse comprised a mixture of well-to-do citizens in addition to the senior officers of the corporation – Mayor, Steward, Recorder, Alderman and Sheriffs – as well as men serving in its financial and legal offices. Between 5th August 1712 and 4th January 1714/5, covered by the first book of the Guardians' Court, there were a total of ninety four officers of the court serving, of

¹⁰⁴ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/1, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor, 17th Feb 1712/3

¹⁰⁵ Paul A. Fideler, Social Welfare in pre-Industrial England (Basingstoke, 2006), pp.153-4

which number, sixty three, or two thirds (67%), were appointees representing a given ward as their Guardian, rather than serving by reason of their seniority in the city corporation, i.e. as Mayor, Steward, Recorder, Aldermen, or Sheriffs (Fig.3).

Fig.3 Workhouse Guardians: No. by period and total duration of service¹⁰⁶

Period	Officers of Workhouse	Guardians	Duration of guardians' total service (all periods)		
			1-2 yrs	>=3 yrs	>=10 yrs
1712-14	94	63	45 (71%)	18 (29%)	5 (8%)
1722-28	115	79	31 (40%)	48 (61%)	15 (19%)
1729-33	98	70	14 (20%)	56 (80%)	22 (31%)

Of the men who served as Guardians within the period 1712-4, more than half served at some other time in some other local office, as constables, law or finance officers, members of the common council, sheriffs or aldermen.¹⁰⁷ There was also a small number of men who served no other corporate role, but are noticeable by having served much longer than average terms as Guardians. Included in this number was Bartholomew Balderstone, a religious dissenter who paid his fines for exemption from formal offices, although following moves towards greater toleration he was later enabled to take office.

¹⁰⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/1, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor; Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/3, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor; Timothy Hawes (ed.), An Index to Norwich City Officers (Norwich, 1989)

¹⁰⁷ Hawes, Index

If we consider the duration of the office of the Guardians, taken apart from the aldermen and others, the length of their term was ordinarily one or two years only, although a number of these men served subsequent terms of service, albeit non-consecutively. For those men serving as Guardians at this time, almost three quarters (71%) served for only one or two years in total, across all periods. If we compare this with the guardians who served during the periods 1722 to 1728, and 1729 to 1733 we can mark distinct changes in the pattern of service from the earliest establishment of the court (Fig.3).

By 1722-8 more than 60% of Guardians served in excess of two years, and 19% of them were in office for more than ten years. This pattern was even more pronounced amongst the Guardians who served in the period 1729-33, of whom just 20% served only one to two years in total, and almost a third of them (31%) served more than ten years. What these figures suggest is that there was a shift between the period when the workhouse was first established and the period commencing a decade later, characterised by much longer periods of service in their position and a lower turnover of officers, with the wards' representation more becoming more settled.

The executive committee which was appointed in August 1712 to determine the working procedure and responsibilities of the workhouse corporation was not, in general, representative of the broader composition of Guardians. Twenty of its twenty three members served in either the senior representative offices or the key legal and financial offices of the city corporation. More than half of the committee were aldermen at that time, with three more present in respect of their being a Sheriff. More than half of the committee also served at one time or another as a member of the

common council.¹⁰⁸ Although less emphatic, the twenty six men appointed to the committees created to discuss ways of costing and raising a stock for the poor through the poor rate, comprised almost two thirds senior civic officers (65%), with more than half (52%) serving as alderman either then or at a later date.¹⁰⁹ The committees, which were charged with the most important business of the court, were dominated by a more select group of men than the guardians as a whole, and were more likely to occupy the most senior civic offices. Whilst this exclusivity meant that the administration of poor relief was perhaps less open than it might appear at first glance, it did help to use the authority of the city corporation, as well as providing practical continuity in managing the business of the workhouse.

The provision offered by the Norwich workhouse did not succeed in staying disquiet about the rising cost of rates, and prompted John Fransham, one of the guardians appointed, to publish a response in 1720. He argued that the workhouse marked a significant improvement on the former parochial system, which had been marked by unaccountable discretionary disbursements by the parish's overseers, in which there was no consistent approach to dealing with the poor. Consequently the rates had continued to rise out of control between 1690 and the creation of the workhouse in 1712, from a little over £1920 to £5032 *per annum*. Under the workhouse system such increases had been curtailed, so that costs had remained much the same in the intervening seven years. The previous year had seen a dramatic drop in Norwich's trade, and resultantly there had been many more labouring poor cast out of work and into dependence on poor relief. Other than this year past,

¹⁰⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/1, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor, 5th August 1712; Hawes, [Index](#)

¹⁰⁹ The committees appointed 9th October 1713, 5th January 1713/4 and 8th June 1714. Norf. RO, NCR Case 20e/1, Court Book of Norwich Guardians of the Poor; Hawes, [Index](#)

though, Fransham thought the problem of the steadily rising costs of the rates less economic, than one of character, and a general decline in the morals of the poor.

Formerly, the greatest part of the labouring People who had Families, took extraordinary Delight in keeping Themselves, their Children, and their Houses, clean and neat, and to have distinguishing Habits for *Sundays* and Holy-days, which delightful (because more independent) State, they knew, could now be obtain'd without laying up something Weekly out of their Income, which Purse inabled them to run through the extraordinary Expences which might arise in the Family, by sickness, and the like, without becoming immediately so wretched, as in all Cases, to be forc'd to supplicate Relief from the Publick.¹¹⁰

Previously the labouring poor had survived on what they were paid, eking it out by living modestly, but a lack of shame encouraged prodigality and drunkenness, so the fluctuations in the market were felt all the more severely with nothing held in reserve to tide them over. Such behaviour, argued Fransham, was now so widespread that it fell to the magistrates to enforce a reformation of morals to impose restraint and effect any reduction in the charges to ratepayers.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ John Fransham, An Exact Account of the Charge for Supporting the Poor (London, 1720), p.11

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.13

5. Civic oligarchy

To what extent any of the corporate offices should be considered oligarchical is open to question. Clark and Slack identified oligarchy as a key tendency in the seventeenth-century, with the extension of central government into local authorities making the patronage of county magnates more powerful in negotiating between the court and the locality, and a growing number of county gentry elected to the parliamentary boroughs.¹¹² However the city's large freeman electorate, in which all freemen and freeholders possessed the franchise, had a significant influence on the election of the corporation, and this combination of factors has been interpreted as the decisive factor in preventing oligarchy from developing in the city.¹¹³

The size of the electorate, and the absence of domination by aristocratic magnates, meant that "the usual methods of influence and patronage" could not be practically deployed in the city's parliamentary elections, although this is not to say that bribery did not have a part to play.¹¹⁴ When party tensions ran high the competition among the populace to secure office for their preferred candidates could be intensely fought, as in 1716, when "rude and riotous behaviour by the rabble of the Freemen" accompanied the Mayoral elections.¹¹⁵ The system of political representation, as it evolved in Norwich, led to fiercely partisan divisions and, as an informant to the Municipal Corporations Commissioners a century later believed, the product of the frequency of elections, which served to sustain factional antagonism, often leading to open dispute.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Clark and Slack, 'Introduction', pp.24-5

¹¹³ Evans, 'The Decline of Oligarchy', p.76

¹¹⁴ Plumb, The Growth of Political Stability, p.73

¹¹⁵ Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

¹¹⁶ Porritt, The Unreformed House of Commons vol.I, p.82

It was not the election of parliamentary representatives alone which was able to rouse such a level of popular engagement. Civic elections to the corporation were also frequently contested strenuously, for the appointment of common councillors, aldermen, sheriffs or mayors. The parliamentary election of 1707 drew more than 2200 freemen voters, and the fiercely fought election of 1710 more than 2400, but the Mayoral election in that year drew in excess of three thousand voters.¹¹⁷ Although the turnout in that year was larger than usual, mobilised by the factional controversies of the day, it was far from being a one-off occurrence. In the 1720s Mayoral elections drew in excess of two thousand votes on several occasions, and the freemen's election of their sheriff drew almost 2800 votes in both 1722 and 1728, figures which are broadly comparable to the turnout for parliamentary elections in the same period.¹¹⁸

However Penelope Corfield has indicated that this was far from the full story, and from the 1720s onwards the composition of the corporate offices can be seen to have become increasingly oligarchic.¹¹⁹ If true, this helps qualify the evidence drawn from the records of the Workhouse Guardians, so that although more open than many corporate bodies, the most important decisions were concentrated largely in the hands of a smaller and more select group. Its mayors and aldermen were drawn from a narrower pool of urban 'pseudo-gentry,' and the 1729 Elections Act was designed to reduce the impact of the popular vote and the freemen's influence on corporation politics.¹²⁰ The 1729 Act can be seen to have been connected to a broader political strategy of Walpole's government, and has been considered alongside the 1725 London Elections Act as signalling a more general tendency towards

¹¹⁷ Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.232-4

¹²⁰ 3 Geo.II c.8

encouraging increased political exclusivity, curtailing the influence of the larger electorate and the Common Councils.¹²¹

The 1729 Norwich Elections Act was prompted by a surge of popular support for Tory candidates in the 1728 common council elections, and was attributed to the meaner sort of freeman voter who tended to mobilise on local matters. A few weeks later the mayoral elections led to fighting amidst demands for a recount, with the Tory mob threatening the Mayor to appoint their favoured candidate, Alderman Harwood, as the new elect.¹²² In response to the defeat and subsequent domination by the Common Council in Assembly, the Whig-dominated Aldermen withdrew for more than a year, slowing corporation administration to a trickle, and raised a petition to parliament, pressing for reform of the voting system for city elections.¹²³ Under the new system the Assembly was split, so that business was transacted by the Council and Mayor's Court quite separately from one another. Furthermore, measures were introduced so that the freemen of each ward elected only three councillors, with the further three appointments being made by the councillors who had been elected.

If the stated intention was to reduce the popular tumults which accompanied elections it was also a deliberate piece of political gamesmanship on the part of the Whigs, seeking to deprive their opponents of a section of its support. A six month qualification for voters, to prevent freemen being admitted immediately before an election, appeared a direct response to venality. However, the section of the working population most likely to support the Whigs

¹²¹ Corfield, The Impact of English Towns, p.153

¹²² Norf. RO, MS 453,T133A folder 50, Nobbs MS History of Norwich

¹²³ Webb and Webb, The Manor and the Borough pt.2, p.546; Wilson, The sense of the people, p.390; Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.321

were the weavers and woolcombers, who had in theory already taken up their freedom in 1723.¹²⁴

By the early 1730s Henry Crossgrove, the Tory proprietor of the Norwich Gazette, was complaining of the diminishing level of competition which existed within the formal political sphere, and on several occasions alluded to the fact that elections were not actively contested. Competition between political factions had recently depended more heavily on the rank-and-file partisan loyalists nominating candidates, whom otherwise might not be nominated by the party leaders in the local magistracy, depending on

the poor Freemen of the High Party... without any Incouragement from the Gentlemen of that Interest; who designed no Opposition.¹²⁵

While representative politics in the city would not disappear, and the Tory-Jacobite faction should certainly not be dismissed as irrelevant in this period – as evinced by its periodic resurgence in elections – concerns for civic order and political stability led to the city's governors palliating its influence. The culture of 'out-of-doors' factional politics was seemingly at variance with the gentlemen's agreements being struck between the political notables behind closed doors. The evidence seems to support Corfield's contention that although Norwich still retained a relatively open constitution, the ruling elite comprised an oligarchy, "self-assured and self-contained," dominating the corporation in the absence of aristocratic or gentry patronage.¹²⁶

Kathleen Wilson drew attention to the fact that the 1729 Act, although in one sense marking a watershed in reducing the popular

¹²⁴ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, pp.321-2

¹²⁵ NG, 8th May 1731

¹²⁶ Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.232-4

influence on Norwich politics, also reinvigorated the Tory opposition, for whom Mancroft ward became a fortress.¹²⁷ This seems to support Crossgrove's observation that the parties' political leaders had by this stage determined not to actively contest certain wards. Wilson indicated that in the years that followed Mancroft was home to a broad anti-ministerialist and anti-corporation opposition, whose interpretation of trade disputed the identification of the city's interests with those of the merchant-manufacturers of the textile trades.

In the course of the first half of the eighteenth-century the 1729 Act was just one of a series of institutional changes which took place to the architecture of the municipal administration and the business of its courts. To some extent these changes can be seen as the corollary of the processes of urban improvement which took place at around the same time, in taking the skein of overlapping jurisdictions which had governed the city, and attempting to amend their practice in order to rationalise and formalise their roles. In 1743 the Mayor's Court commissioned Edmund Locke to compile and codify the rules for their procedure and function, laying out the rules and functions of the court in order that it could be clarified and referenced all the more easily.¹²⁸

This can be seen more clearly in the similar case of Alderman William Clarke's reformation of the Company of St George, which organised the ceremonies and feasts for the city's Guild Day, when the Mayor was annually appointed to office. The Company was composed of a small group of citizens who, each year, oversaw the organisation of the festivities and appointed four men to bear the costs of the Mayor's feast, held in the New Hall at St Andrew's. Refusal to pay their share could result in an excessive fine and the

¹²⁷ Wilson, *The sense of the people*, pp.391-2

¹²⁸ Norf. RO, COL 5/13, Edmund Hooke, Rules for the practice of the Guildhall Court, 1743

threat of imprisonment if not met, with their fines going into the Company's stock. Clarke, having been appointed by the Guild in 1729, had entered into a lengthy dispute with them and lobbied the Assembly that the Guild's actions were arbitrary and needed to be reined in. As corporative feasting smacked of greed and self-indulgence, squandering the public stock, over the course of the century it was increasingly a common cause for complaint.¹²⁹

In response the Guild ran adverts in the city's press, to ensure that he was excluded from the feast.

Whereas some Persons would avoid paying the BROTHERS-MONEY under Pretence of their not having been invited in Form by the Feast-Makers... And to avoid all Manner of Dispute when there, all Gentlemen concern'd are to take Notice, That those who have Made the Feast, or Bought Off, are to Take Place of such as have not.¹³⁰

Having consulted the Assembly books Clarke declared that the only authority the Company could lay claim to was based on its origins as a medieval religious guild, and whatever legal rights they claimed had been dissolved during the reign of King Edward VI. Any subsequent powers the Guild claimed were based on the repetition of custom only, and not on any formal legal right. Moreover their charter stipulated that as a society they were solely voluntary, and, as such, they could claim no authority over the citizen body as a whole. The Assembly in consideration of his findings deferred the decision to Clarke, and he ordered them to surrender their charters, regalia and Snap-dragon up to the corporation. Henceforth instead of the St George's Company and the city Companies in their livery accompanying the Mayor in procession, the Common councillors of

¹²⁹ Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman, p.217

¹³⁰ NG, 18th June

the city would ride with him on horseback, dressed in their ceremonial gowns.¹³¹

The immediate effect of these changes was to consolidate authority in the corporation, and underline the more prominent role accorded the common councillors in the Mayor's Day procession. Underlying such changes were the powers which had been vested in customary practice being transferred to bodies which operated more clearly within the realm of chartered and codified public authority, redrawing and formalising their respective jurisdictions and roles.

When, in 1741, the Tories and 'Patriot' opposition appointed the nominally Whig Clarke as one of their candidates for the parliamentary election, this was less indicative of Tory redundancy than it was the heterogeneous make-up of the opposition, and was perhaps motivated by his persistence in campaigning against the greed and oligarchical privilege which seemed concentrated in the St George's Guild.¹³² Following the changes to the city's political representation in the 1720s the corporation itself, as the eighteenth-century progressed, came also to be suspected by many as being oligarchic and unconstitutional, a feudal remnant, like the guilds, of the imposition of a monopolistic system of order which burdened its rate payers and ill-recognised their economic interests.

¹³¹ Mackerell, 'The Company of St George', pp.356-74; O'Sullivan, Politics in Norwich, pp.67-8

¹³² Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.338

CHAPTER FOUR – Methodism, Scandal & Disorder

1. Outline

The events of the early 1750s help to identify some of the disquiet which was experienced locally about the effects of the wide-ranging changes to society. The disagreements that occurred following the introduction of Methodism to Norwich, ostensibly a dispute about religious practice, help expose underlying concerns of the time about social order. These concerns were not isolated to the governors' attempts to maintain the peace of the city, but reveal a more deep-rooted sense of uncertainty regarding the impact on people and families of wide ranging social changes, weakening the deference and amity which bound together both community and society.

These anxieties were played out in the press, but the role played by print itself increasingly came to the fore as a suspect in unsettling the good order of the city. Over the course of this chapter and the one that follows it I will focus attention on these events. One of the most prominent themes of this chapter is the engagement of both the Methodists and their critics with print in order to legitimate their actions to the public. However the public accessibility of print came to be seen as posing a similar threat to that presented by Methodist worship, by subverting polite intercourse and creating a spirit of enthusiasm and faction. Underlying such concerns were more general misgivings about the effects of universal access to the public forms of expression and representation. The next chapter concentrates on the near contemporary occurrence of a trade dispute between the master and journeymen woolcombers in 1752. I will explore what this episode reveals about the economic and

social relations in the city at this time, before examining the connections between the two sets of events.

In its edition of November 30th 1751 the *Norwich Mercury* reported that an information had been lodged against a Mr Wheatley for preaching in the city without his having been licensed to do so. Amongst the newspaper's advertisements printed that week was notice which took an explicit swipe at Wheatley.

LOST

A METHODIST PREACHER

If he will return to the Tabernacle of St John's of Timberhill... he will be kindly received, and meet with proper Encouragement; if not, he is desired to return the Money he carried away with him belonging to his Dear Hearers, or he will be prosecuted for the same.¹

Accusations of financial impropriety were common complaints levelled against the early Methodist fellowships, and an imputation which Wheatley repeatedly struggled to shake off. The term "Dear Hearers" was employed in such a way as to emphasise the "sanctify'd singularities, low fooleries, and high pretensions"² of the Methodists, and draw attention to their strange, *enthusiastic* manner of worship.

That week's news was just the beginning of a protracted series of highly public exchanges which engrossed the citizens' attention, and projected the divisions it brought to light onto a national stage. The blasts and counter-blasts which raged between antagonists left their publications to posterity, yet getting to the bottom of events demands caution in treating those sources too uncritically. Much of

¹ *NM*, 30th Nov. 1751

² George Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd* (London, 1749), p.v

this material was interpreted and reused fairly freely, both at the time and by subsequent scholarship. The picture of events that they portray are anything but uniform however, with quite significant discrepancies manifest between different accounts. The way that affairs were represented was to prove deeply divisive, exploiting existing religious and political fault lines within both city and society, as well as tapping into shared anxieties.

The range of opinions and positions evident in the documentary sources necessitates that we not take them to be straightforwardly factual, as they throw up significant contradictions and gaps in their version of events. Certain facts we can be reasonably certain of, supported by multiple sources, but others are quite likely fabrications, embellishments on sources reprinted from elsewhere, and repackaged as new and true accounts, and so devotedly partisan that we are compelled to question their truthfulness. Many of the Methodist sources were reused in succeeding centuries as part of a larger narrative recounting the Methodists' inspiration and evangelisation of a nation of sinners "that know not God to any saving purpose", and their reliability seemingly cemented by mere repetition.³ Similarly the reports given of Jacobite conspiracies and 'Hellfire Clubs' seem to have been trotted out to provide evidence of the vitality of Jacobitism, or merely add anecdotal colour, without being qualified too critically.⁴

Print reported and represented what was happening, but it also played a more active role, directly affecting the course of subsequent events. Public interest in the controversy was such that publishers dashed out a stream of coverage to match demand. William Chase, publisher of the *Norwich Mercury*, capitalised on

³ John Wesley, *A Sermon before the Society for Reformation of Manners* (London, 1763), p.4

⁴ Paul Kleber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.201-2

events by publishing *An Extract of the Life and Death of Mr John Janeway*, which was attributed to Wheatley's authorship. The work had originally been written by James Janeway, the popular seventeenth-century spiritual writer, and how much Wheatley even knew about its publication is uncertain.⁵ Chase was a frequent critic of the Methodists, although presenting himself as impartially reporting in the public interest, but he was also an opportunist, and Wheatley's notoriety created a market for the work.⁶ Similarly there is no evidence which links Wheatley to the publication of a martyrological work printed under his name by John Wesley's publisher in the same year, and which might similarly have been cashing in on his raised profile, either for financial gain or to help publicise the trials and tribulations suffered in the name of evangelical Methodism.⁷

2. James Wheatley and evangelical Methodism

James Wheatley first arrived in the city around the beginning of September 1751, and shortly thereafter began preaching in the open-air, initially near the gates to the Cathedral precinct,⁸ and then on the Castle Hill. Preaching both morning and evening, he quickly generated extraordinary interest among the townspeople, drawing large crowds to see him speak, estimated at anything up to ten thousand on Sundays.⁹ From the first there were attempts to

⁵ James Wheatley, *An Extract of the Life and Death of Mr John Janeway* (Norwich, 1751); James Janeway, *Invisibles, Realities* (London, 1674)

⁶ David Stoker, 'Prosperity and success in the eighteenth century English provincial book trade', *Publishing History* 30 (1991)

⁷ James Wheatley, *The lives, tryals, and sufferings of the holy apostles* (Bristol, 1751)

⁸ A Member of the Houses of Shirley and Hastings [Aaron Seymour], *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon vol.II* (London, 1839), p.328

⁹ Thomas Dixon's letter to Rev. Leeson, in J. Adlard, *Particulars of the Life of a Dissenting Minister* (London, 1813), pp.182-3

disrupt his sermonising and his stay in the city, but the greater part of the masses he drew were sympathetic to him, and the city's magistrates did not intervene for fear of stirring up crowd.

The evangelical Methodism preached by Wheatley appealed to the residual puritanism which had persisted, both in the moderate Calvinism of many Anglicans and more notably amongst the city's long-established dissenting communities. Accounts of the early success of his ministry seem to indicate that amongst these non-conforming constituencies he found an audience receptive to his evangelism, although at first there was no great concern amongst the Presbyterian leaders of losing their congregation.¹⁰ Indeed relations with a number of the more influential dissenting figures in the city seem to have been quite cordial, and it was alleged by critics that Alderman John Spurrell, a prominent member and benefactor of the Presbyterian meeting house, took efforts to help settle Wheatley and establish a *Tabernacle* for his society, styled after George Whitefield's London meeting house.¹¹ It has been noted elsewhere that a number of the prominent Anglican converts to the evangelical cause in this period came from Huguenot families, and Norwich still possessed a sizeable population with similar origins, largely anglicised by the passage of time.¹²

The Methodists' emphasis on personal piety was consistent with a programme for the reformation of manners, evident in the measures against trading on Sundays, gaming and swearing profane oaths, periodically enforced by the Mayor's court. In the preceding years such efforts to impose good moral order on the city had found some of its most active supporters in a number of the magistracy, such as Philip Meadows and the Mayor Timothy

¹⁰ [Seymour], Selina, Countess of Huntingdon vol.II, p.328; Adlard, Life of a Dissenting Minister, p.183

¹¹ The Anti-Chronicle (Norwich, 1753)

¹² G.M. Ditchfield, The Evangelical Revival (London, 1998), p.48

Balderstone, whose personal sympathies were with protestant non-conformity. Dissenting figures, such the Quaker Henry Jermyn, came to the defence of the Methodists during their persecution, and their evangelism also attracted to their number men and women like the Baptist Timothy Keymer.¹³ The established dissenting congregations of the city were not so settled that they were closed to the evangelists' practice, and William Lombe, whose family were part of the prosperous mercantile and manufacturing elite of the city, with ties to both Quaker and Presbyterian fellowships, began using his home in St Andrew's parish as a meeting house, also marking him out for the attention of the mob.¹⁴

Although having been closely associated with John Wesley, Wheatley was influenced by the style and sentiment of Whitefield's Calvinist Methodism, and some who were attracted by his preaching also reported finding the content of his teaching 'very dark and inconsistent'.¹⁵ Whilst the theological laxity of Methodism, its "eagerness of zeal, devoid of the light of knowledge",¹⁶ distanced it from the mainstream of rational dissent, it also appealed to many who had been alienated by much contemporary dissenting theology.¹⁷

Wheatley had been active in the Methodist movement since 1742, and within several years had established himself amongst the first rank of lay preachers, and was appointed one of a select number of trusted 'assistants' to John Wesley.¹⁸ There were some minor

¹³ John Chambers, A General History of the County of Norfolk vol.III (Norwich, 1829), p.1264; D.S. O'Sullivan, 'The Case of James Wheatley, Methodist', Norfolk Archaeology 36 (1975), p.170

¹⁴ NM, 21st Sep. 1751; A True and Particular Narrative of the Disturbances and Outrages that Have Been Committed in the City of Norwich (London, 1752), p.5

¹⁵ T. Keymer, The Wolf in Sheeps Cloathing (Norwich, 1754), p.5

¹⁶ David Bogue and James Bennett, History of the Dissenters vol.II (London, 1833), p.46

¹⁷ Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, pp.28-34; Elie Halevy, The Birth of Methodism in England (Chicago, 1971), pp.45-8

¹⁸ John S. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies (London, 1923), pp.369, 380

differences with Charles Wesley, who accused him of being wilful, 'stiff-necked' and obstinate,¹⁹ but in June 1751 he faced much more serious accusations of impropriety. The Methodist fellowship in his care at Bradford in Wiltshire contacted the Wesleys to allege that he had abused his position and committed adultery with seven of his congregation. When confronted with the evidence he was at first "stubborn and hard; but relented afterwards... He pleaded guilty, but justified himself... [and] threatened to expose *all* our Preachers; who *he said*, were like himself."²⁰ The Wesleys formalised their feelings in a letter, in which they demanded he cease preaching to their societies, at least until the matter could be settled at the next Methodist conference.

Because you have wrought folly in Israel, grieved the Holy Spirit of God, betrayed your own soul in temptation and sin, and the souls of many others whom you ought, at the peril of your own life, to have guarded against all sin; because you have given the enemies of God, whenever they shall know these things, cause to blaspheme the ways and truth of God; we can, therefore, in no wise receive you as a fellow-labourer, till we see clear proofs of your zeal and deep repentance: of this, you have given us no proof yet.²¹

The letter underlined the extent to which the Wesleys were conscious how his personal conduct might reflect on Methodism, by playing into the hands of its critics who insinuated something lascivious in their preaching, in the lack of emotional restraint apparent in their piety, and their talk of *love feasts* and the like.

¹⁹ Charles Wesley, Journal vol. II (London, 1849), pp.61-2

²⁰ Ibid., pp.82-3.

²¹ [Seymour], Selina, Countess of Huntingdon vol.II, p.328

This fact was not aided by his claims that he had behaved no differently from the other preachers.

Wheatley was determined to continue his work as a lay-preacher, and this may well have informed his decision to leave Bristol and make his way to Norfolk. The national network of Methodist societies was in the late 1740s composed of seven regional circuits, serviced by itinerant preachers who made their rounds.²² They preached along their routes, and imposed administrative and disciplinary conformity on the affairs of the established societies, drawing them into a nationally co-ordinated movement with the *episcopate* of John Wesley himself at its centre. The minutes of the first Methodist conference demonstrated how they conceived these circuits would work, radiating out from their regional strongholds to extend its reach: going "a little and a little farther from London, Bristol, St. Ives, Newcastle, or any other Society."²³ However the circuits' coverage was geographically uneven, and tended to be concentrated in the west and south-west of England, the north of the country and the immediate environs of London. One consequence of this pattern of development was that East Anglia had no established Methodist presence at the time, and consequently Wheatley would have been able to preach there, largely outside of the sway of the societies under John Wesley's direct influence.

If it was Wesley's genius for organisation which enabled Methodism to grow and develop as a national movement, then it was the genius for evangelising, typified most prominently by George Whitefield, which was the spirit animating this reformation, and which, in the first period of Methodism, provided the platform to

²² John Wesley, 'Copy of the Minutes for the Conference of 1746', in John Bennet, Copy of the Minutes of the Conferences (London, 1896), p.38

²³ Frank Baker, 'Polity', in Davies and Rupp (ed.), History of the Methodist Church in Britain (London, 1965), pp.213-55; John Bennet, 'Copy of the Minutes for the Conference of 1744', in Minutes of the Conferences, p.15

command the attention of their audience.²⁴ Methodism was conceived not as a denomination, but as a movement for evangelical renewal and reform within the Church of England, after the fashion of religious societies like the SPCK. However the nature of the Methodists' organisation and its devotional practices could create the impression of its separation from the episcopal hierarchy of the Anglican church, as well as the denigration of the offices of its clergy; in other words, the very ills that the SPCK was striving to rectify.²⁵

Wheatley's own qualification and authority to preach – as an ignorant mechanic and, according to the complaints of several correspondents, an illiterate unable to speak English properly – was to prove a source of contention and criticism.²⁶ On a number of occasions his heavily accented style of speech, as well as the fashion of his 'methodistical cant', was parodied by critics in the pages of the local press:

Dare Brathers and Saisters in the Laird, you must jayn in
Harts and Hands, and not be sparing of your Parses, to
suppart the grate Wark that Chraist is doeing amangst
you: It's all for Chraist's Sake, and cane you geve too
muche fore the sweat Laird Jaisus. If any repaint of whate
they geve afterwards, or went it for other Occaisions, they
may depend it shall be return'd into tham agane; For
believe me my Dear Dear Norwich Hearers, it's all for the
saike of your dare pracious Sauls.²⁷

²⁴ Gordon Rupp, Religion in England (Oxford, 1986) chs.20-22; Halevy, The Birth of Methodism

²⁵ Craig Rose, 'The origins and ideals of the SPCK 1699-1716', in Walsh, Haydon and Taylor, The Church of England (Cambridge, 1993), pp.174-9

²⁶ NM, 14th Dec. 1751; Adlard, Life of a Dissenting Minister, p.183

²⁷ NM, 11th Apr. 1752, Letter from 'An Independent Citizen'

Wheatley's character appeared rude and unpolished, possessing little of the refinement or delicacy which might be have been expected of polite discourse. In an age in which much religion had become increasingly mannered and urbane, his style of speech and the evangelical zeal of his preaching provided a dramatic contrast.²⁸ There is no evidence supporting the claim made in a letter to *The Gentleman's Magazine* that he was a 'Welch cobbler', but this was a charge commonly made of Methodist preachers, on the basis of a play-on-words regarding the care of souls (soles).²⁹ The pun turned on the hubris of "unletter'd Laics to take upon them to expound or interpret the Scriptures".³⁰ The early Methodist lay-preachers could not, in the main, be considered gentlemen, but equally were ordinarily not drawn from the poorest labouring classes. Social analysis of their backgrounds indicates they often practised a trade into which they had been apprenticed, and which has led to them being identified as part of an emergent middle class.³¹ However during the earliest phase of Methodist evangelicism of the 1740s and 1750s, when its character was still developing, such distinctions should employed with greater caution.

Both before and after he arrived in Norwich Wheatley seems to have been working as some sort of physician, hawking balsams and medicines besides his own hymnals. Certainly, as a mountebank and chapman he would have been able to earn a living whilst on the road preaching, which in itself guaranteed no income besides a small living allowance.³² When the Wesleys commanded him to stop

²⁸ Lawrence Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', *Historical Journal* 45:4 (Dec. 2002), p.889

²⁹ *The Gentleman's Magazine* XXII (London, 1752), p.90; Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked* (London, 1960), p.65

³⁰ Joseph Trapp, *The Nature, Folly, Sin and Danger of Being Righteous over-much* (London, 1739), p.10

³¹ John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers* (Milton Keynes, 2009), pp.46-8; Clive D. Field, 'The social structure of English Methodism', *British Journal of Sociology* 28:2 (June 1977)

³² Frank Baker, 'Polity', pp.235-6

preaching they were at pains that he also cease practising 'physick', so he presumably had another trade to fall back on. He was referred to as having worked at a loom, and elsewhere as a 'strolling clothier', and if true his decision to travel to Norwich may have been influenced by practical opportunities for employment in the textile manufactory.³³ The immediate impact he made in Norwich ensured that no such source of work was required under the circumstances, and he took to preaching four or five times a day, and then conversing further with the hundreds who came to him seeking his counsel.³⁴

A contemporary critic of Methodism queried the legitimacy of lay-preachers, who might, in their proper trade, "be useful, and earn his Bread in an honest Way, but growing idle and self-conceited, the general Method is to turn Exhorter."³⁵ Wheatley's social standing and his material circumstances were considered by many a determinant of his authority to preach, and as we have seen, economic dependency smacked of mendacity, undermining the credibility of his evangelical mission for the care of souls.³⁶ When Wheatley first arrived in Norwich it was alleged that he had initially claimed to be a "Man of Fortune, and as such acting on a disinterested Motive, yet, in a short Time collected Pence and received Treats from the poorest and meanest of the People".³⁷ Such allegations were a common criticism of the Methodists, and accusations that Whitefield and Wesley had lined their pockets were intended to depict them as exploiting the credulity and ignorance of the poor and impressionable, who were more susceptible to the sentimental fervour of their rhetoric.

³³ NM, 11th Apr. 1752; NM, 9th May 1752

³⁴ Adlard, Life of a Dissenting Minister, p.182

³⁵ Theophilus Evans, The History of Modern Enthusiasm (London, 1752), p.76

³⁶ See ch. 1

³⁷ NM, 14th Dec. 1751

3. Outbreak of anti-Methodist disturbances

When events first came to a head, it was concerns about the money given to Wheatley by those who came to hear him which were foremost among the complaints voiced. The pence and presents solicited "occasions the labouring people to go without their dinners... [while] he pockets 10 or 12 guineas every week", and forced families into the care of the parish.³⁸ If there is little documentary evidence of rising tensions in the city from the situation as it was described at the end of September, that situation soon changed, and after the first outbreak of unrest in November it came to dominate the local printing presses over much of the next couple of years.

The richest primary source, which shaped later accounts of the rioting and disorder, was *A True and Particular Narrative of the Disturbances and Outrages That have been committed in the City of Norwich*, a pamphlet of forty pages published in 1752. It presented the first person testimony of events made by Richard Lodge, who had been active in the anti-Methodist protests, and was supplemented by a number of letters to newspapers and diary entries made by members and supporters of the Methodist society. The opening passages which introduced the text made its sympathies quite apparent, lauding Wheatley's work as effecting

a most remarkable reformation... amongst the people, notorious for all kinds of vice and immorality, prophaneness and irreligion... and a spirit of seriousness was visible throughout the city, even those who were before the most abandoned.³⁹

³⁸ *The Gentleman's Magazine* XXII (London, 1752), p.125; Cozens-Hardy, *Mayors of Norwich*, p.121

³⁹ *A True and Particular Narrative*, pp.1-2

Written at a time when violent disagreements in the city about Wheatley's society continued to rage, it sought to present a narrative which detailed the godlessness and seditious motives of their opponents, as well as the Methodists' own loyalty and their conformity to the Church of England and the King. In relating events it underlined the failure of the magistracy to maintain civic order, and its negligence in quelling the rising tide of irreligion and immorality, against which the evangelical movement had mobilised. Comparison with other available accounts of events underlines the partiality of its treatment and, if hardly disproving the narrative presented, at least urges the reader to approach it critically.

The first eruption of crowd violence was not spontaneous, but was apparently a planned and deliberate exercise. Lodge's story recounts how on Thursday 21st November he and a number of others were greeted in the inn by a Mr Tinkler, who was raising a mob against Wheatley, and assured them that if they joined him they would be looked after and would not want for a drink. Tinkler carried with him the paraphernalia for a riot tucked into a sack, and equipped the men with a drum, a woman's red cloak and a cap, and armed them with marrowbones and cleavers. He blacked the men's faces with a burnt cork, and then dressed one in a bulls-hide and gave him a horn, mounting him on a horse in the yard of the inn.⁴⁰ As they entered the Castle ditches, where they thought they would find Wheatley preaching, their small group met a larger crowd, numbering several hundreds, led by 'Captain' William Foster, a publican and parish clerk of St Peter per Mountergate. When they received news that he was at the Methodist's tabernacle on Timberhill they proceeded there in order to disrupt the meeting.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.3-4

The crowd blew trumpets and banged drums outside, and some began to vandalise the meeting house, pushing and jostling Wheatley's hearers. Alderman John Spurrell, who had gone to the Tabernacle, ordered the Riot Act be read, which led the crowd to disperse and prevented any serious mischief being done. According to Lodge's account, throughout proceedings a supply of ale was brought to them, the treat of various gentlemen from the nearby inn, and when the crowd drifted away Foster attempted to rally them, crying "Give one more hearty crack, and then go to old *Lombes*, and give him one too, and come into the market, and hollow Church and King, and down with the Meeting-houses".⁴¹

Many of the theatrical features mentioned in the account are familiar from descriptions of similar crowd actions of the period: the blacking, wearing of horns, and the beating of drums, pots and pans to raise a great clamour. The historiography of popular protest has identified such ritual elements as quite specific to forms of '*rough music*', and as a familiar form of ritual would have been recognisable as such to the public. Accounts of the customs of the city made in the eighteenth-century describe *ridings* taking place "in ridicule of a man who hath been beaten by his Wife or of both of them", but records that "being so ridiculous & tumultuary the magistrates have often put a stop to them & punished the chief of them for making a riot."⁴²

Cases of rough-music were markedly similar in their form to the public punishments meted out by the authorities for moral offences, but which by the end of the seventeenth-century were increasingly in abeyance. Characteristically the crowd invoked the defence of the community as legitimacy for their actions, and the diminishing role of the ecclesiastical courts in policing transgressions might have

⁴¹ Ibid., p.5

⁴² Norf. RO, MS 453, folder 60, Misc. antiquarian papers

served to create a vacuum which informal, extra-legal forms of regulation such as ridings filled. These 'anti-processionals' in some measure parodied the civil ceremonies of corporation and church, maintaining a precarious balance between "mockery of authority and its endorsement, the appeal to tradition and the threat of rebellion."⁴³ One such occasion, at Magdalen Fair in 1659, led to the prosecution of a man who put on ram's horns, marching up and down at the head of a crowd, and proclaiming himself "Mr Maior did go from Booth to Booth & get drink & shaking his horns saying they were his Ruff".⁴⁴

What was common to all of the different ritual forms of rough music was the "total publicity of disgrace", in which the grievances against its target were enacted and made overt on a public stage, a spectacle of scandal and humiliation before the community.⁴⁵ Although not applied even-handedly to all cases, these sorts of theatrical protests were frequently mobilised in reaction to cases of adultery or domestic violence, often where expectations regarding gender roles between husband and wife had been turned upside down. Such actions appealed broadly to the community as the basis of their authority, with transgressions conceived as threats to the integrity of normative social relations. The sanctions ordinarily invoked to enforce norms are generally informal, operating outside of institutional parameters of the law, and "range from gossip to open censure, ostracism, or dishonour for the transgressor."⁴⁶ The redress of private offences, made public through ritual, served to underline the interconnectedness of household and community, and has informed the description of such performances as a patriarchal

⁴³ Thompson, 'Rough Music', pp.478-82

⁴⁴ Norf. RO, MS 453, folder 60, Misc. antiquarian papers

⁴⁵ Thompson, 'Rough Music', pp.487-8

⁴⁶ Bicchieri, *The Grammar of Society*, p.8

practice. Such a formula is not unproblematic, but does help to identify a key element in the logic of such social performances.⁴⁷

A similar intent was evident throughout subsequent incidents, when the continual low-level harassment of the Methodists bubbled over and further violent confrontation took place. There was a common perception that Wheatley was favoured by the city's governors, and "offence at some encouragement given by the magistrates" was felt to have roused the crowd to rectify matters.⁴⁸ When he temporarily left Norwich for London the society was ministered to in his absence by the preachers William Cudworth and James Silverthorne. In mid-December the Methodists' opponents conspired to stage an ambush for Cudworth and throw him into a cesspit: a plan which, had it succeeded, would certainly have served to humiliate and shame the preacher, but which also smacks of ritual defilement.⁴⁹

This point is significant, as it would be consistent with an anthropological analysis of the scenario. Mary Douglas identified the ritual use of dirt and obscenity as originating with countering the threat of violated social taboos which arise from objects or people which transgress the established order of things. Such rituals are ordinarily invoked only where there exist no other practical sanctions to provide redress.⁵⁰ In the case of the Methodists such a case of transgressive dissonance might have been perceived in the status of the preachers themselves, as laymen and itinerants lacking parochial or episcopal authority, or even as a more general moral threat to the stability of the social fabric. In the absence of official prosecutions by the magistracy or church such rituals of rough music provided the means for a section of the populace to

⁴⁷ Thompson, 'Rough Music', pp.499-503

⁴⁸ The Gentleman's Magazine XXII (London, 1752), p.90

⁴⁹ A True and Particular Narrative, pp.10-3

⁵⁰ Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger (London, 1984), pp.128-32

represent itself as the community, and assert its conception of order.

When, the following week, Silverthorne fell sick with smallpox he was singled out for the crowd's attention. On Boxing Day 'Captain' William Foster raised a mock funeral party, dressing a dozen men in mourners' cloaks who went in procession bearing a coffin and carrying placards inscribed 'Blasphemy', 'Imposter' and 'Antichrist'. The procession marched up and down past the Methodists' Tabernacle and down to the Bell Inn for the benefit of the Hellfire Club before proceeding to the house where Silverthorne was critically ill, where they drew to a halt, shouting and causing a great commotion. In the castle ditches they raised a bonfire into which they threw the coffin "with these words, *Therefore we commit the Body of Hellfire Dick to the flames*".⁵¹

The allusions to the influence of the Hellfire Club on events is central to the interpretation presented in the *True and Particular Narrative*, presenting the image of a cabal of influential men manipulating the mob to do their work. Furthermore the account fails to mention the reading of the Riot Act by Alderman Spurrell, and by doing so presented an image of disorder left unchecked by a magistracy ill-motivated or ill-equipped to take decisive action to restore order.

4. Religious and political dimensions

The other allegation running through these accounts was that those who opposed the evangelicals were, at best, religious bigots, characterised in a Methodist satire, *The Chronicle of the Preacher*, as "the Men of Saccheverell", whose intent was not just the

⁵¹ *A True and Particular Narrative*, pp.14-5

persecution of the evangelicals, but of the protestant dissenters as well, inciting and raising a mob to violate the legal principles of toleration.⁵² Worse still, they were accused of Jacobitism and sedition.

One of the more memorable and influential features of the narrative created by the Methodist cause in Norwich were the reports of the Hellfire Club, who provoked the disorders and kept them stoked, providing ale for the mob and ensuring they were kept out of gaol and on the street. Whether any club of that name actually existed outside of the pages of the *True and Particular Narrative* is highly questionable. There is however significant evidence that there was an organised drive against the Methodists, with meetings convened in city inns for gentlemen sympathetic to ridding the city of Wheatley, largely on the basis that his preaching led to disorder and was keeping people from their labours.⁵³ Such a group of men might well have also been responsible for maintaining a fighting fund to raise bail and fines for those charged with disorder. Support was also evident amongst some of the city's governors, with Alderman John Goodman, one of the city's sheriffs, prominent in his sympathy for the anti-Methodist rioters.

When the rioters finally appeared before the magistrates, on charges of breach of the peace, disturbing the congregation and assault, at the city's quarter sessions in January, a verdict against them could not be reached, and it was alleged that Goodman, as sheriff, had packed the jury to ensure that the rioters would not be prosecuted. One man was committed to gaol for want of sureties, but was promptly bailed out the same day.⁵⁴ Charges were subsequently raised against members of the Methodist congregation

⁵² The Chronicle of the Preacher (Norwich, 1753)

⁵³ NM, 21st Dec. 1751; NM, 28th Dec. 1751

⁵⁴ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/21, Norwich Quarter Sessions Minute Book, ff.212-4; NM, 1st Feb. 1752; A True and Particular Narrative, p.20

for assaulting the protesters, with either side lining up against the other to present their depositions and counter-depositions at the next court sessions, where the greater part of the cases against either side were discharged.⁵⁵

There was an evident party political dimension, with some of the more prominent Whigs, like Aldermen Spurrell and Philip Meadows, who were active within dissenting fellowships, generally more supportive of James Wheatley's right to preach in the city, perhaps eager to effect a reformation, or at least to defend principles of toleration. Similarly the Mayor, Timothy Balderstone, had previously been captain of the fiercely Whig Loyal Artillery Company, which in previous years had been at the forefront when political tensions surfaced. The Artillery Company had been disbanded in 1750, after many of the gentlemen in its ranks withdrew amidst concerns over its role in fomenting partisan divisions in the city. Stripped of much of its more august and polite membership it no longer commanded "the Spirit & Credit in respect to Numbers or Discipline" as formerly, and its officers and committee elected to suspend its activities.⁵⁶

Linda Colley has identified the use of High Tory rhetoric and slogans as providing an effective means for protestors to voice discontent with Whig and non-conformist dominated authorities. Consequently the anti-Methodist rioting 'snowballed' into opportunist protests about the corporation's rule and suspicions of corruption.⁵⁷ Given the highly partisan Whig Balderstone's mayoralty, this offers a highly plausible interpretation.

On both sides of the dispute the press was employed as a means to publicise their respective cases and petition the magistracy to support their legal rights and prosecute their opponents. Almost

⁵⁵ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/21, Norwich Quarter Sessions Minute Book, ff.215-7

⁵⁶ Norf. RO, COL 7/40, Elisha de Hague, MS Account of the Artillery Company, p.68

⁵⁷ Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy*, p.156

from the first allegation was met with counter-allegation. 'Captain' William Foster posted an advertisement in the *Norwich Mercury* following the first outbreak of rioting, allegedly orchestrated by him, that his house had been attacked and his windows broken by a mob of Wheatley's Methodist supporters.⁵⁸ William Chase, in spite of his claims to journalistic impartiality, published *A Serious Caution against Enthusiasm and Religious Delusion*, offered at three half-pence each, or ten shillings per hundred copies "to those who are disposed to give them away".⁵⁹ Criticism of the Methodists, which in the weeks and months which followed filled the papers, sermons and print satires, could be used by some Tory churchmen as the means to question the authority of dissenters in the civic elite, and more generally of "Novelties in State or Church".⁶⁰

Tory critics of the Methodists like Theophilus Evans, author of *The History of Modern Enthusiasm*, represented them as merely the latest in a continuous line of puritan enthusiasts and King-killers.⁶¹ However the Whig interest, and the dissenting traditions so strongly identified with the city's Whigs, should not be automatically assumed to have been universally sympathetic to the Methodists. Many Whig churchmen were vocal in their opposition to the Methodists, and the most influential anti-Methodist tract of the period, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd*, was the work of the Bishop Lavington, a highly partisan Whig. Certainly some of those who offered support to the rioters at the meeting house can be identified as maintaining cordial relations with the established dissenting communities. For example, John Aggas was one of those who raised sureties for the anti-Methodist rioters, but was also a subscriber to the collected sermons of the Presbyterian

⁵⁸ *NM*, 20th Nov. 1751

⁵⁹ *NM*, 14th Dec. 1752

⁶⁰ *The Methodists, A Humorous Burlesque Poem* (London, 1739), p.11

⁶¹ Evans, *History of Modern Enthusiasm*; Geraint H. Jenkins, 'Evans, Theophilus (1693 -1767)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn.

minister Samuel Bourn, assistant to John Taylor at the city's Octagon chapel.⁶² The poll books for the 1760s also indicate that in the parliamentary elections Aggas consistently voted with the corporation candidates.⁶³

Most of the criticism aimed at Wheatley did not target the principles of toleration in general, but maintained that he was guilty of holding unlawful, and therefore disorderly, meetings. The failure of the magistracy to prosecute was taken to legitimate the right of people within the city to take action in defence of the church and good order, and by political opponents to criticise the Mayor, Timothy Balderstone, and a number of the aldermen as 'Oliverians', conflating the Whig-Dissenting interest with the regicides and Levellers of the seventeenth-century.⁶⁴ Protestant non-conformists, prominent amongst the Norwich Whigs, had achieved a degree of political respectability and acceptance, but Wheatley's society seemed to threaten the gradual shift towards full toleration. In the absence of formal religious liberty the measure of toleration had in practice provided the dissenters with the means to secure some measure of influence and respectability, and whilst formally making up just a small fraction of the population of the city they were disproportionately prominent amongst the wealthiest and most influential citizens.⁶⁵

Moreover, if the Methodists' ministry was in principle meant to supplement the spiritual needs of the laity, not displace the care of the parish church or non-conformist meeting house, in practice they were often seen as engrossing these congregations. The later drift of Wheatley's Calvinist Methodist congregation to the Baptists and

⁶² Samuel Bourn, A Series of Discourses on the Principles and Evidences of Natural Religion vol. I (London, 1760)

⁶³ The Poll for Members of Parliament For the City of Norwich (Norwich, 1761); The Poll for Members of Parliament For the City of Norwich (Norwich, 1768)

⁶⁴ The Anti-Chronicle

⁶⁵ O'Sullivan, Politics in Norwich, 1701-1835, pp.7, 221

Independents is indicative of the proximity of their patterns of faith.⁶⁶ The picture sometimes made of dissent in decline is not entirely consistent with such confident projects as the construction of the Octagon chapel several years later, a building Wesley thought "perhaps the most elegant one in Europe".⁶⁷ The aggressive evangelicism of the Methodists, as it sowed the seeds of discord, threatened such accommodations.

One publication, written by Charles Perronet in defence of the Methodist society, went further and identified the parties behind their persecution as the Jacobite Hellfire Club "in Conjunction with Papists and Protestants", whom it alleged made up the greater part of the mob.⁶⁸ Such claims were in part a response to the *Address to the Protestant Dissenters of the established Congregations in Norwich*, published after the initial rioting by a non-conformist detractor. The *Address* proposed that having "long lived in Peace and Quiet, and in good Understanding with the Members of the established Church; therefore I hope that our Brethren will not... encourage, or defend *Enthusiastical, Methodistical* Preaching."⁶⁹ If the Methodists' detractor was seeking to distinguish them from the established dissenting congregations, it is worth noting that Perronet was intent on doing the same. Perronet and his publisher, Felix Farley, were both active in the Wesleyan Arminian movement, and their intent in distancing the Methodists from the Dissenters was by way of emphasising their loyalty to the Church of England, amid accusations of separatism.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ [Seymour], *Selina, Countess of Huntingdon vol.II*, p.336-8; George Dyer, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson* (London, 1796), pp.24-32

⁶⁷ John Wesley, *Works vol.III* (London, 1810), p.315

⁶⁸ CP [Charles Perronet], *A summary View of the Doctrine of Methodism* (Bristol, 1752), pp.23-7

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ian Maxted, 'Farley family (per. 1698 -1775)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004: online edn, Jan 2008

Both the Methodists and their fiercest critics maintained the legality of their respective positions, and at least initially their arguments were presented as appeals to the magistracy to execute the law in defence of their respective interest. These attempts to mould official, as well as public, opinion should be understood in the context that there was considerable uncertainty in the provinces as to the legal position of the Methodists.⁷¹ In the absence of consistent guidance from either the Church of England or the Courts, local magistrates were unsure as to how far the Methodists' nominal conformity to the Church of England meant that they were free to evangelise. When Wheatley returned to the city in mid-January the threat of renewed and persistent disorder led to the Mayor's court taking action and insisting that he was licensed as a dissenting protestant preacher.⁷² Similarly William Lombe, whose house had also been a focus for protests, took the oaths prescribed by the Act of Toleration and was certified, so that their activities could be seen to be in conformity with the law.⁷³

However, Wheatley's decision to be licensed as a dissenting minister seemed only to further undermine any appeal to liberty of conscience, as it was remembered that he had previously taken the sacraments and sworn himself a member of the established Church of England. To now set up as a non-conformist seemed opportunistic and an act of bad faith or deliberate dishonesty. The court's measures signally failed to draw a halt to the differences which raged, as it only seemed to now confirm the Methodists as schismatic and separatists from the Church. A letter to the *London Evening Post* bemoaned those city magistrates "whose tender Consciences would not allow them to do their Duty, by impartially

⁷¹ David Hempton, 'Methodism and the law, 1740-1820', Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 70:3 (1988), pp.93-107

⁷² NM, 25th Jan. 1752

⁷³ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/21, Norwich Quarter Sessions Minute Book, f.213; 1 Will. and Mary c.18

executing those Laws intrusted to their Care; the only Means that could legally and effectually have kept us clear of so great a Nuisance... How will you believe that there are Men, of some Consequence in this City, weak, wicked, and ignorant enough, to call the enforcing of this Act of Indulgence, Persecution?"⁷⁴

5. Fears of disorder

In part allegations against Wheatley and his society were responses to the evident enthusiasm of the Methodists' creed, which provoked discord as it drew out partisan divisions within the city, creating an adversarialism which people connected to the religious and political dissension of Queen Anne's reign and the civil wars. The mannered forms of sociability and restraint associated with the development of politeness grew out of such fears of conflict, "necessary guards of the decency and peace of society", fostering reconciliation and tolerance.⁷⁵ The evangelical enthusiasm of Wheatley and his followers was corrosive to such compromises, with its lack of moderation proving both unsociable and divisive.

Accusations were frequently made that the Methodists were levellers, fuelled by the large number of followers from the lower social orders. At the time opponents were quick to ascribe such an appeal to opportunism. Wheatley's sermons, they claimed, appealed to the vulgar tastes of the people.

"Preaching in the Streets and publick Places of this City... Curiosity drew the Mob about him, till the Novelty of his Enthusiasm, and the Sublimity of his Nonsense fixt their

⁷⁴ London Evening Post, 15-18th Feb. 1752

⁷⁵ Lord Chesterfield, Letters (Oxford, 1992), p.262; Lawrence E. Klein, Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness (Cambridge, 1994), p.4; Klein, 'Politeness and the Interpretation of the British Eighteenth Century', p.889; Phillipson, 'Politeness and politics', p.223

Attention: The Weak amongst the Multitude, at the name of JESUS incessantly repeated began to think the Man Religious, and his Doctrine Divine".⁷⁶

Recent scholarship has also speculated that for many Methodism's appeal likely also rested in the sense that their doctrines offered salvation for all, not just for the respectable churchgoing classes.⁷⁷ Wheatley wrote, quoting Wesley, that "It is the free Gift of God, which He bestows not on those who are worthy of his Favour, not on such as are previously Holy... but on the Ungodly and Unholy... whose only Plea was, God be merciful to me a Sinner."⁷⁸ The Methodist preacher's rhetoric that all were sinners, even the regular churchgoer who possessed "*outward* Religion without *inward*", and could not be saved until they had been justified by God's grace, stirred up much indignation, as all were reduced to the same station.⁷⁹

However, allegations of schismatism ran more deeply than the religious settlement alone, and exposed strongly felt anxieties regarding the social order, which seem to have been widespread at the time. In a long letter published in the *Norwich Mercury*, entitled *The Fruits of Enthusiasm*, many of the contemporary criticisms of the Methodists were drawn together and concisely expressed. The letter writer, claiming to be an industrious man of the city, described how he took great pride in his relationship with his servants. He treated them kindly and generously, and ruled over his once happy home as a fatherly duty of care. However, around

⁷⁶ *NM*, 8th Feb. 1752

⁷⁷ Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2008), p.61

⁷⁸ J.W. [James Wheatley], *An Earnest Appeal to the Inhabitants of Norwich* (Norwich, 1752)

⁷⁹ John Wesley, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (Bristol, 1743), p.23

Michaelmas, when Wheatley began preaching in the city, a change came over his cook, who at their domestic devotions

mutter'd to herself incoherent Stuff, so that those who kneeled by her, could hear nothing but Sweetest Jesus! loveliest Lord! dearest Spouse! with Grace and Spirit, and inward Light, and Heart's Blood and Wounds, and several other Words and Phrases jumbled together without any Sense or Signification.⁸⁰

Soon after his butler began to refuse to say 'Amen' after the prayers, which he observes caused "great Schism and Divison amongst us", and due to their refusal to comport themselves properly were forced to worship separately from the rest of the household. The pernicious effects of Methodism ran even more deeply, and "I saw with Concern that the Love and Respect usual in my Family began sensibly to decline, and neglect of social Duties, as well as secular to encrease."⁸¹ His cook began to neglect her work, as well as her personal hygiene, and even refused to continue supporting her elderly mother, paying her dues instead to the preacher, and forcing her into the workhouse.

Such criticisms articulated the main sources of contention, and Wheatley himself was acutely aware of the force of such allegations and saw fit to counter them by publishing a pamphlet in response, defending his evangelical mission in the city.⁸² Wheatley's emphases provide probably the clearest picture of his own position, as well as the key objections raised against him: of the Methodists' itinerancy and street-preaching, taking money from the poor people of the city, making men and women idle by preaching too

⁸⁰ NM, 22nd Feb. 1752

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² [Wheatley], An Earnest Appeal

frequently and that he had created divisions in private families, with claims that "Wives robb'd their Husbands, Children became disobedient to their Parents, and Servants neglected their Lord's Work to follow the Preacher".⁸³ Of these criticisms it is the last that cut deepest, as the Methodist cause appealed more particularly to women and younger people and so threatened to break up families, as they were brought into direct disobedience with the head of the household.⁸⁴

These criticisms appealed to a domestic, patriarchal metaphor to describe a disorder affecting both body and society. Methodism was accused of exploiting and unsettling the constitution of well-meaning, but suggestible, individuals. Similarly they subverted domestic arrangements and duties of service to one's employers, and threatened society at large with fissure and disorder, by eating away at the bonds of affection and obligation which maintained stable social relations.

At the time that these exchanges about the effects of Methodism were dominating the letters pages of the local press the front pages had been singularly absorbed by the case of Mary Blandy. Blandy was a young woman from a notable and well-to-do family of Henley-on-Thames, who had been seduced by a young military officer who proposed marriage to her, although already married in Scotland. Her father was steadfast in his resistance to the match, and when he died soon afterwards his daughter was subsequently discovered to have poisoned him. The story engrossed the attention of the newspapers in a quite unprecedented manner, with whole issues given over to accounts of her case, providing detailed updates on her demeanour in prison, and spawning numerous

⁸³ The Anti-Chronicle (Norwich, 1753)

⁸⁴ John Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob', in Cuming and Baker (ed.), Studies in Church History (Cambridge, 1972), p.223

publications.⁸⁵ In the wake of her arrest and trial there were a spate of similar stories about daughters and servant-girls inspired to poisoning.

The Blandy case seemed to tap into a definable anxiety present at the time regarding the general erosion of those reciprocal and intimate bonds considered fundamental to the good order of society. The local printers, whose facility to respond swiftly to a perceived gap in the market can be employed as a barometer for the public temper of the time, responded by turning out *A Warning Piece against the Crime of Murder*. The book was addressed "To the Masters of Families" and recounting those parricides and petty-treasons which violated "the strictest Ties of Blood and Friendship".⁸⁶ Seemingly echoing the same concerns, the grand jury for the county assizes in January had published in the papers an order for the closer regulation of alehouses, appealing to the fact that "the Servants and younger sort of People are become more dissolute, vicious, and corrupt in their Morals, that the necessary Restraints of Servitude are rejected, and refused to be complied with".⁸⁷

6. The criticism of 'enthusiasm'

In a final, scatologically comic, flourish the author of *The Fruits of Enthusiasm* recounted an incident in which his cook emitted such groans and screams when using the privy that they assumed she had been struck dead, but it transpired that whilst at her stool she felt a *stirring* that she took for the movement of the Holy Spirit in her, and was taken in pentecostal rapture, and "the Spirit she said

⁸⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine* XXII (London, 1752), pp.108-17

⁸⁶ *NM*, 23rd May 1752

⁸⁷ *NM*, 25th Jan. 1752

commanded her to sing to her sweet Jesus in one of Mr W____y's Hymns."⁸⁸

The letter reiterated the more general contemporary criticism of religious enthusiasm, frequently taken as a form of religious melancholia which affected the sentiments, and which perverted the true course of a healthy constitution. The Bishop of Exeter, George Lavington likened Methodist enthusiasm to Catholicism, both bearing "a similar Configuration and Texture of Brain".⁸⁹ Methodists, he argued, were guilty of the same fanaticism and tendency to self-mortification; they rejected all simple recreational pleasures out-of-hand, incapable of moderating or reasoning, "for fear of dispersing a little of that black bile, that gloomy humour, which is the most essential Ingredient, in their Religion."⁹⁰

The description of enthusiasm in such materialist terms, explained as the product of a morbid disorder of the body, was one frequently repeated. Methodists' appeals to their direct experience of God was easily dismissed as a form of insanity, prone to hallucination and unable to distinguish between illusion and reality. As Lavington concluded

So that now every flash of zeal and devotion; every wild pretension, scheme, tenet and over-bearing dictate; impulses, impressions, feelings, impetuous Transports and Raptures; intoxicating vapours and fumes of Imagination; Phantoms of a crazy brain, and uncouth effects of a distemper'd mind, or body; their sleeping, or waking dreams; their actions and passions, &c. — all are ascribed with an amazing Presumption to the extraordinary interposition of *Heaven*... Here we have the true Spirit, and very Essence of Enthusiasm, that ungrounded pretence to

⁸⁸ NM, 22nd Feb. 1752

⁸⁹ Lavington, The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compar'd, p.10

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24

Inspiration; which of course makes men peremptory and pertinacious, sets them above carnal reasonings, and all conviction of plain Scripture.⁹¹

Such a criticism was not without some substance, and reiterated Locke's criticism of religious enthusiasm as rooted in the denigration of reason at the expense of one's private experience of 'particular revelation'.⁹² The belief that God acted directly on their impressions and emotions, another sceptic rued, "will make Men as confident in *wrong* Practice as in *right*".⁹³ George Whitefield conceded that whilst one might receive divine inspiration, the experience of it might be suffused with the imagination.⁹⁴ Similarly sensitive to the force of such accusations, John Wesley, whilst placing great stead in the importance of such personal forms of inner experience, warned that such impressions were, by their nature, uncertain; "They *might be* from GOD, and they *might not*, and therefore not simply to be relied on (any more than simply to be condemned) but to be fixed by a further Rule; to be brought to the only certain Test, the Law and the Testimony [of scripture]."⁹⁵ Wesley's moderation of the authority of direct revelation was not solely a pragmatic compromise to critics, but helped emphasise the necessity of Methodism's orderliness and obedience to the authority of church and the secular state, and in part reflected his own conservatism.

If human nature consisted of two distinct parts, the rationality and the animal instincts, then it was the exercise of reason which was

⁹¹ Ibid., p.49

⁹² John Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding vol.II (London, 1748), pp.318-9; John Locke, 'Extracts from Locke's common-place book', in Peter King, The Life of John Locke vol.II (London, 1830), p.98

⁹³ Evans, History of Modern Enthusiasm, p.77

⁹⁴ George Whitefield, Some Remarks on a Pamphlet entitled, The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compar'd (London, 1749), p.43

⁹⁵ John Wesley, Comments to the Author of the Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compar'd (Dublin, 1750), p.19

the true measure of a gentleman, according to polite discourse.⁹⁶ Dictionary definitions of the time underlined the association of enthusiasm with unconstrained violent passions, described as *Rude*, *Uncivil*, and *Rustical*, and antithetical to the restraint and moderation of the emotions central to civility and polite norms of behaviour.⁹⁷ Such attitudes about the need to keep the emotions in check, easily dismissed in retrospect as mannered affectation, have been comprehensively linked to wider processes of social change and state-formation. Consequently the ways in which social relations were enacted were being gradually transformed, moving towards greater moderation and management of one's instincts, "eliminating these functions from social life and displacing them behind the scenes."⁹⁸

It was a frequently voiced criticism that Methodist preachers were merely rabble-rousers who stirred up the crowd and promulgated disorder, appealing to their listener's emotions rather than their reason. Such accusations were anathema to John Wesley, who, writing in December 1751, decried such 'Gospel preachers' as speaking nothing more than "an unconnected rhapsody of unmeaning words, like Sir John Suckling's verses".⁹⁹ He laid the blame for such a style squarely at the door of James Wheatley, whose populist showmanship had corrupted the public and turned them against true Methodist preaching. Wesley himself was wary of the play of unbridled emotions, and drew a causal connection between ill health and the "violent and sudden passions [which] dispose to, or actually throw people into acute diseases."¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁶ Richard Steele, *The Guardian* vol.II (London, 1822), pp.216-7

⁹⁷ Johnson, *Dictionary* vol.I; Johnson, *Dictionary* vol.II

⁹⁸ Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners* (Oxford, 1978), p.139; Norbert Elias, *Power & Civility* (New York, 1982), pp.235-8

⁹⁹ John Wesley, 'Letter on Preaching Christ', in *Works* vol.VI (New York, 1835), pp.558-9

¹⁰⁰ John Wesley, *Primitive Physick or An Easy and Natural Method of Curing most Diseases* (London, 1785), p.xvi

emotional content of the Methodists' religious experience, of its construction as the expression of their personal conversion through the sensation of God's grace, led to its characterisation as a feminine movement. Subsequently this characterisation has gone hand-in-hand with some relatively crude psychologising, which has tended to underplay the way in which this emotional core also facilitated an engagement with questions about sensibility and personal agency.¹⁰¹

Methodism maintained that feelings and emotions were fundamental to experience, as they constituted a spiritual sense which was sensitive to divine inspiration.

And seeing our Ideas are not innate, but must all originally come from our Senses... till you have these Internal Senses, till the Eyes of your Understanding are open'd, you can have no Apprehension of Divine Things, no Idea of them at all.¹⁰²

Reason alone was not sufficient to know God. Only by opening one's heart could he be received, and any such knowledge of God required an awareness of one's emotions, treating what one was moved to feel as a variety of empirical experience.

Whilst in principle the polite division between faith and rationality native to the eighteenth-century latitudinarians was marked by a notional egalitarianism, as a form of virtue in which social rank was esteemed less significant than the exercise of reason, in actuality it was still highly sensitive to distinctions of gender and social status. It has been argued by Patricia Crawford that in the early years of the century there was a 'feminisation of religion,' in which religion

¹⁰¹ D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "My Chains Fell off, My Heart Was Free", Church History 68:4 (Dec. 1999), pp. 910-929; Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, pp.402-11; Mack, Heart Religion, pp.131-6

¹⁰² John Wesley, An Earnest Appeal, p.16

became more-and-more associated with the private world of the household, and less with a public, political world whose discourses appeared increasingly secular.¹⁰³ Women came to take a prominent role in matters of household religion, and their effective, if not complete, exclusion from public life led to such discursive distinctions mapping onto the separation of gender roles. Such an explanation can be criticised for underestimating the continued importance of religion to politics and public life, but it seems to touch on some of the underlying reasons for the disproportionately high number of women in church congregations, and in particular amongst dissenting and Methodist fellowships.

Given the high visibility of women active in Methodist worship, it was particularly vulnerable to gendered criticisms of its credibility.¹⁰⁴ At the time medical authorities such as Dr George Cheyne considered women to possess particularly delicate sensibilities, meaning that they were more easily impressed upon. Women's nervous systems were treated as physically different from men's, being finer and more sensitive. As such it was postulated that they felt things more intensely, but consequently were weaker, prone to their feelings being overwhelmed and to *hysteria*.¹⁰⁵ Cheyne likened the nervous system to a musical instrument, that "Some of the Parts of this Instrument being more delicate than others, are sooner disorder'd or broken."¹⁰⁶ Similarly both women and men from an inferior social background, by possessing less developed capacities of reason, were thought more susceptible to their feelings.

Satires of the Methodists made such criticisms explicit:

'Twas necessary first to raise

¹⁰³ Patricia Crawford, Women and Religion in England (London, 1993), pp.204-8

¹⁰⁴ David Hempton, Religion of the People (London, 1996), pp.179-196.

¹⁰⁵ G. J. Barker-Benfield, The Culture of Sensibility (Chicago, 1992), pp.24-36

¹⁰⁶ George Cheyne, The English Malady (London, 1733), p.69

A Party, to sound forth their Praise,
 And no better way than the Common,
 Of getting in first with the *Women*;
 Since they do seldom e'er dispute
 Or argue, cavil, or confute...
 What *Maid* wou'd not be holy kist?
 Or who her Teacher can resist?
 ...If they to Godliness give way,
 Then warmly push the am'rous Play—
 A *Devotee* is soonest won—
 --Who feels more *Passion* than a NUN?—
 And ev'ry Priest declares abroad,
Religion is a charming B[aw]d.¹⁰⁷

The heightened passions associated with enthusiasm, particularly when allied to the nuptial language common to Methodism, suggested impropriety and were linked in popular satires with licentiousness and sexual immorality.¹⁰⁸ A similar lack of restraint was identified by their accusers in the 'hurly-burly' of evangelical worship and, drawing on accounts from New England, it was asked of the

groaning, fainting, falling down, praying, laughing, skipping about, shaking Hands, and embracing, (the latter, says my Author, was commonly practised by different Sexes)... - And was this not an inviting Religion to Rakes and Libertines?¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ The Methodists, A Humorous Burlesque Poem, pp.19-20

¹⁰⁸ Lyles, Methodism Mocked, pp.69-71, 89-91

¹⁰⁹ Charles Chauncy quoted in Evans, The History of Modern Enthusiasm, p.75

In Lavington's opinion the lack of emotional control evident in the enthusiasts' spiritual affections deranged people's constitutions and easily spilt over, leading to a "violence of Passion (not quite so spiritual) for some of their neighbours."¹¹⁰ Similar claims played on the hypocrisy of the Methodists, whose overweening pronouncements on sinfulness were often less than welcome, while a letter published in the *Norwich Mercury* claimed that the Methodists' love-feasts and meetings were "well known to vie for Chastity with a Brothel."¹¹¹ The same suspicions were played out rather luridly in a contemporary publication entitled *The Story of the Methodist Lady*, claiming to be based on fact. The tale recounted how a serious and well-meaning woman was alienated from her husband by her infatuation with the overwhelming passions provoked by Methodist worship. The delusions of enthusiasm led the woman first to adultery and then an illegitimate pregnancy, culminating finally in her lover being forced at gunpoint to castrate himself by her cuckolded husband, made finally to rue his negligence as head of the household.¹¹²

If the emphasis on women's more delicate sensibilities meant that they were considered particularly at risk of being overpowered by the feelings associated with the evangelical experience, conversely it also meant they were more sensitive to what they were feeling. The conviction that the acuity of women's *inner senses* made them more receptive to the movement of the spirit, and encouraged them to analyse and articulate their experiences.¹¹³ The division of Methodists into bands within their societies provided women with the opportunity for spiritual reflection and education, but also

¹¹⁰ Lavington, *The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists compar'd*, p.59

¹¹¹ NM, 11th Jul. 1752

¹¹² *The Story of the Methodist Lady* (London). The publication is undated, but Field provides an initial publication date of 1752. Clive D. Field, 'Anti-methodist publications of the eighteenth century: A revised bibliography', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 73:2 (1991), p.194

¹¹³ Mack, *Heart Religion*, p.133

served to inculcate the ability and confidence to speak before a group, and provided the sense of legitimation which encouraged a small number to begin preaching in their own right.¹¹⁴

7. Attempts to quell the divisions

The analogical similarities drawn between corporeal disorders and those of the household and civic society were expressions of a patriarchal discourse which articulated reservations about the effects of unrestrained passions, particularly amongst women, the young and the meaner sort, who were attracted in large numbers to Wheatley. In addition to quickening dissension, the strangeness and charismatic appeal of evangelical pentecostalism was perceived by many as directly eroding the authority of husbands, masters, magistracy and church alike: "wives and children, masters and servants are of little account, in respect of the *dear hearer*, and *holy inspir'd preacher*".¹¹⁵ Such concerns were not readily abated, and the *Norwich Mercury* continued to air the disagreements over the following months, with both sides seeking to publicise their own representations, drawing in the London newspapers and the printers to publish their pamphlets. However, as the sporadic and occasionally violent breaches of the peace of the city continued, public opinion seemed to grow ill-at-ease about the threat posed by ongoing unruliness.

At the end of February notices were lodged in the press by the city's magistracy, laying down the law and emphasising that any disorders would not be tolerated, and would face punishment.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Vicki Tolar Collins, 'Walking in Light, Walking in Darkness: The Story of Women's Changing Rhetorical Space in Early Methodism', *Rhetoric Review* 14:2 (Spring, 1996), pp.338-42; Mack, *Heart Religion*, pp.135-6

¹¹⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine* XXII (London, 1752), p.125

¹¹⁶ *NM*, 22nd Feb. 1752

The warnings were not immediately successful, and a number of anti-Methodist mobbers tried to break into the home of Henry Jermyn, where Wheatley was staying. The election for the county coroner on 4th March resulted in crowds gathering in the city, and provoked similar scenes, during which several men accused of being Methodists were assaulted and thrown down the castle hill. When, a week later, rioting again broke out in the evening at Jermyn's house, Balderstone sent immediately for the dragoons quartered in the city to disperse the crowd after he had read the Riot Act.¹¹⁷ The night watch was doubled for several weeks, and shortly afterwards 'Captain' William Foster was convicted of keeping a disorderly house, in part on the testimony of Richard Lodge, the one-time rioter.¹¹⁸ These measures finally seemed to have an effect as low-level disorders temporarily stalled, although the Mayor, Timothy Balderstone drew fire, receiving several anonymous threatening letters.¹¹⁹

If the violence had eased off, the divisions had only grown more entrenched, and the accounts relayed by either side seemed to agree on very little, even disputing whether particular events had actually occurred, as was the case for allegations that the anti-Methodist mob had also attacked the Baptist and Independent congregations.¹²⁰ Whilst the *True and Particular Narrative* reported almost constant rioting throughout March 1752 this is not reflected in the civic records, and it seems probable that events were dressed up to rally national support.¹²¹ The controversies continued to be voiced through the letters printed in Chase's *Norwich Mercury*, but many seemed to be coming to feel that this was itself a source of unrest by helping stir up the *mob*. Many of his correspondents

¹¹⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 13th March 1752

¹¹⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/21, Norwich Quarter Sessions Minute Book, f.215

¹¹⁹ *NM*, 28th Mar. 1752

¹²⁰ *London Daily Advertiser* 17th Feb. 1752; *NM*, 22nd Feb. 1752

¹²¹ *A True and Particular Narrative*, pp.31-9

became increasingly vociferous in criticising their antagonists as well as the Methodists themselves, one voicing his concern to see "such of the Clergy as have stoop'd to this Controversy, more expressly in their proper Duty."¹²² The Mayor's court was foremost in putting pressure on Chase to draw a veil over such quarrels, but in response to criticism he printed that he would resist any such attempts to still his printing presses and defend the "LEGAL Liberty of publishing whatever may tend to the Discovery of Truth... and shall continue to be impartially open to every honest Inquirer after Truth, Promoter of Virtue, and Establisher of the PEACE OF THE CITY"¹²³

Presumably it was on the back of such concerns that lawyers representing the group of gentlemen who had been active in mobilising resistance to Wheatley's preaching were alleged to have approached the Methodists with an attempt to cut a deal. In return for any prosecutions against the rioters being dropped at the upcoming quarter sessions they offered to withdraw any assistance and support from their side, and would henceforth provide no further bail for anyone arrested in the tumults. A further meeting was arranged, but just two weeks later Wheatley was assaulted by a crowd of people who attacked the Tabernacle.¹²⁴ Any hopes of a truce seemed to evaporate, but it also raised questions about whether the mobbers actually answered to anyone. When, on 16th June, Thomas Hurnard was appointed Mayor for the coming year, in place of Timothy Balderstone, it was alleged by the authors of the *True and Particular Narrative* that the mob was emboldened, declaring "They had not got an Oliver Cromwell for their mayor now."¹²⁵ Hurnard had only been elected alderman for Fyebridge ward in February of that year, and was a prominent member of the

¹²² *NM*, 9th May 1752

¹²³ *NM*, 7th Mar. 1752

¹²⁴ *A True and Particular Narrative*, pp.35-6

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.39

city's mercantile interest. He was a less obviously partisan figure than Balderstone and it was hoped that he would be able to unite the aldermen behind him.¹²⁶

Within several weeks William Chase had announced that he would print no more letters relating to the Methodist controversy unless he received payment for doing so, and whilst the measure did not completely silence the paper war which raged, it did have an effect in quietening down the exchanges. Shortly afterwards the assizes sermon preached at the Cathedral took as its subject *The Mischiefs of Enthusiasm and Bigotry*, which declared its aims to be restoring "that PEACE and CHARITY, which had suffered so much from the public unhappy Dissensions of mistaken, but well-meaning Men."¹²⁷ The sermon defended the rights to liberty of conscience, but condemned both parties for disregarding the public authority of the law and magistrates on the basis of the "fond and fanciful suggestion of private men".¹²⁸ The message of the sermon was a demand for reason and moderation, underlining that further factiousness would not be tolerated. The city's governors attempted to ensure that the message would be as widely heard as possible by authorising it for publication.

If the position taken by the civic magistracy articulated the public disquiet about the continuing conflicts it did not however mark an end to the eruptions of violence against the Methodists. Serious rioting again broke out in August, and the magistrates were forced to intervene in person to rescue Wheatley, with John Goodman, who had allegedly used his shrieval office in support of the anti-Methodist rioters earlier in the year, apparently active in the efforts to protect him from the excesses of the crowd.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Cozens-Hardy, *Mayors of Norwich*, pp.125-6

¹²⁷ Richard Hurd, *The Mischiefs of Enthusiasm and Bigotry* (Norwich, 1752), p.vi

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹²⁹ Cozens-Hardy, *Mayors of Norwich*, pp.125-6

The Mayor's court immediately moved to license Henry Jermyn's home as a meeting house, providing the legal protection to dissuade further attacks, as well as resolving any legal ambiguity which protestors could claim to legitimise further assaults.¹³⁰ There is anecdotal evidence that there remained consistent ill-feeling, occasioning periodic harassment, but public disorders on the scale of the earlier rioting became less frequent as the city government moved swiftly to limit any outrages. With the Methodist society's New Tabernacle under construction by the prestigious builder Thomas Ivory it seemed that Wheatley might manage through sheer perseverance to hang on long enough to gain a foothold in the city. Any such hope was to be frustrated when he found himself embroiled in further allegations of sexual incontinence which only served to reignite tensions, provoking further popular clamour.

8. Scandal and the dangers of reading

Although Wheatley had been the subject of rumours of infidelity, they had been paid little credence by those close to him. It was only when a young female member of the society, Mary Towler, approached one of the society's leaders, seeking his counsel, that she confided "Mr Wheatley's frequent Acts of Adultery, and Uncleanness, both with herself, and Circumstances relating to many others".¹³¹ When questioned, Wheatley denied the allegations, but as more evidence came to light it caused a breach within the society. Some of the society approached the Wesleys for support, and in order to rid them of Wheatley's influence the allegations

¹³⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/21, Norwich Quarter Sessions Minute Book, ff.222-4

¹³¹ Keymer, The Wolf in Sheeps Cloathing, p.7

against him were put in print, including some of the more salacious details provided by witnesses to his sexual incontinence.¹³²

Charles Perronet, a close associate of the Wesleys, had already published a series of letters in which he accused Wheatley of moral turpitude and identified him as a Moravian and antinomian, a criticism frequently made by the Arminians against their Calvinist brethren. Perronet claimed that Wheatley's orthodoxy had been undone by his work as a surgeon, that "reading of Aristotle, Culpeper and so forth, had corrupted him".¹³³ Wheatley responded to the allegations of adultery in print, asserting that Mary Towler had herself been the perpetrator of such rumours, and had forced herself on him. Several female members of the society claimed that Towler had confided her sexual fantasies to them, that

Miss T[owle]r asked her whether she had ever known a Man, at which she replied, how should I any more than you: She then said I have read R[ocheste]r's Poems, and they have corrupted my Mind, and if I could happen with what we call a sober Man, that would not expose me and I was not afraid of being with Child, he should lay with me.¹³⁴

Both the testimony of Towler's voracious sexuality and Perronet's account of Wheatley's perversion turned on supposed narrative episodes which depicted the harmful effects of reading. Exposure to the erotic poems of Rochester, or to Culpeper's *Midwifery* was enough to overwhelm and disorder the sensibilities, to lead them

¹³² Keymer, The Wolf in Sheeps Cloathing; Keymer, The Fawning Sycophant Display'd. Although Keymer was credited as the publisher of these pamphlets they appear to have been the anonymous work of William Chase. David Stoker, 'Prosperity and success'

¹³³ Charles Perronet, Letters to Mr. James Wheatley (London, 1754)

¹³⁴ A Reply to The Scandalous Papers of Mrs M--- and Mr T--- K-----r (Norwich, 1754), pp.10-11

from the path of orthodoxy into abnormal opinions and desires. Not everyone was affected equally, and whilst a gentleman might read such books with little harm, women and a meaner sort of man, whose rational faculties were weaker and more prone to emotion, were far more at risk. An otherwise positive appraisal of women's learning, made several decades later, maintained that the "world is too miscellaneous a work for their chaste perusal."¹³⁵ Women were recommended instead to learn from their miscellanies and catechisms, which would provide a safer medium.

The manner in which Methodism developed lent itself to generating a culture in which many men and women felt enabled to engage the public through sermons and print, and where social expectations might not have previously extended to them sufficient authority to do so. Although initially opposed to lay preaching, John Wesley came to tolerate it as "an absolute necessity... inasmuch as were it not, thousands of souls would perish everlastingly", but refused to countenance lay preachers administering the sacraments.¹³⁶ If the practical effects of the structure of the evangelical movement was to open up engagement in the public world to lay preachers and their band leaders, that was mirrored by an accompanying sense of disquiet about the effects of such changes, and in particular about the effects of print.

Much of the popular opposition to the evangelical Methodist movement recognised that its structure and devotional practices were novel, and saw in this novelty the seeds of a violent rupture with the settled pattern of order, by neglecting allegiances to the community, the church and the family. There was a common perception that their allegiances threatened stable social relations by eroding settled structures of authority for governors, masters,

¹³⁵ The Lady's Magazine I (1770), p.468

¹³⁶ John Wesley, Works vol. VII (New York, 1835), pp.289-91; Adrian Burdon, Authority and Order (Aldershot, 2006), pp.22-3, 49

husbands and fathers. The patriarchal analogies employed reminded that by unsettling these relationships Methodism was weakening the reciprocal arrangements of paternalism and deference which underwrote the stability of the customary society. However, in part, this was also a response to the obvious appeal that it had for women, the young, and the meaner kind of people, and the way in which its preaching seemed to rouse heightened passions, leading to widespread faction and conflict which threatened the stability of the city, and the kind of good order necessary for the maintenance of an orderly and prosperous civic and economic life.

A similar concern about the effects of print was evident in the pressure the magistracy brought to bear on William Chase to limit his coverage of the controversies in the *Norwich Mercury*, and desist from providing a platform for contention. If opposition to James Wheatley's presence in the city had initially led to a measure of indulgence towards, and in some cases direct support and encouragement for, the actions of the mob, as time wore on fewer seemed able to support such a position. With mobbing and misrule becoming a recurrent fixture of events the sense of licence posed a perceptible threat to the good order of the city. There was a fear that a section of the populace had become disordered and increasingly brazen, and disturbances were not limited to the Methodists' meeting houses. On the 15th June at Drayton, outside the city, a group of local men met with tools and caused a breach in the river wall, in what seems to have been a dispute with the owners of the mill over use of common land.¹³⁷ Worse was to follow, as prosecutions against the embezzlement of yarn and textiles, initiated by the city's governors at the behest of the city's larger manufacturers, culminated in direct confrontations between city officers and the crowds.

¹³⁷ NM, 20th Jun. 1752

The spirit of licence which accompanied events easily spilt over, as the crowd became used to legitimising its actions as a defence of the community, and ultimately threatened to undermine social proprieties. Gaining public support for the mob's protests against the Methodists was an important factor in encouraging their actions. Rather than simply disordered, criminal acts, they consistently attempted to frame their actions in such a way as signified their authority to act:

assurance was needed that the acts of violence in question were not immoral, illegal or excessive, and that they had received the sanction of the agents of local authority.¹³⁸

There was a concern on all sides with the need to legitimise themselves. The protests against Wheatley assumed a variety of devices to publicise their actions as carried out on behalf of the public interest, and in defence of the community. The theatrical spectacle of the first attacks on the meeting house with its blacking of faces, costumes and props, the ritualised violence of the attempted assault on Cudworth, and the appeals in the press were all intended as forms of publicity, signifying their legitimacy by claiming to act in the public interest.

¹³⁸ Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob', p.217

CHAPTER FIVE – Artisan culture & economic change

1. Background to events

The violent disagreements which convulsed Norwich in the early 1750s played out against a background of relatively rapid social and economic change which had a tangible effect on people's day-to-day lives, quite apart from the purely ideological issues which were at stake. The events around the introduction of Methodism to Norwich occurred at a time when the city's manufactory faced increased competition from expanding textile production in the north of England. Although the city's trade was prospering, increasingly competitive markets meant that the commercial aristocracy of the city were attempting to change their own manufacturing processes in an attempt to increase productivity.

However in a city with such a highly developed and entrenched sense of artisanal pride any efforts by the most affluent merchant-manufacturers to change the settled practices of the manufacturing system were not so easily implemented. The division of skilled labour, with most work carried out within small workshops, meant that the journeymen and small masters had developed a high degree of independence in their working culture. What this degree of separation and self-regulation meant in practical terms was that implementing change was difficult to enforce without negotiation between the larger master manufacturers and the journeymen and smaller masters who carried out the work.

The journeymen woolcombers were unlikely to surrender their say over parts of the working process which fell under their supervision if there was any suspicion that it would weaken the status and stability invested in their artisan working culture. The campaign of

prosecutions undertaken by the city's magistracy against the embezzlement and theft of textiles proceeded from an act recently passed by parliament. The legislation, procured after lobbying by the city's grandees, was as much motivated by providing them with the upper hand in managing these labour relations as it was about reducing theft.¹ In this chapter I examine this economic situation, and in particular how it shaped the disagreements between the master and journeymen woolcombers in 1752. Having explored the issues at stake I will then return to examine how these incidents related to, and qualifies our understanding of, the events caused by James Wheatley's introduction of evangelical Methodism to the city.

In previous decades, faced with changing patterns of consumption, Norwich's manufacturers had successfully adapted to the contraction of domestic markets for its woollens. The centrality of the trade in textiles to Norwich's economic wellbeing and the resultant efforts to protect the stability of their domestic and overseas markets meant the city had to be more outward-facing than many urban centres, maintaining close links with the diplomatic and military initiatives of the executive.

In 1719 the importation of dyed cotton fabrics caused a dramatic downturn in demand for Norwich stuffs, and turned many out of work. The corporation and Worsted Weavers Company both petitioned the House of Commons, pressing for an end to imports on the grounds that the trade was languishing, "under such Discouragements by the universal wear of East India Goods, Callicoes, and printed Linens".² The Norwich manufacturers Daniel Meadows and John Gurney were charged by the corporation to represent the concerns of the city's trade to the House of

¹ 22 Geo.II, c.27

² 7 Geo.I, Stat.1 c.7; Journals of the House of Commons vol.19, pp.168, 176 ,182

Commons.³ The East India Company had defended the import trade both in terms of its economic benefits, and because the sumptuary restrictions proposed by the bill encouraged the legislative to adopt excessive measures, which tended to unchecked and arbitrary rule. Gurney's speech before the House of Lords on 28th April was acclaimed as winning Parliament's support for the bill, cautioning that

if not prevented by the Legislature [calicoes and East India goods] would eat out the wear of our woollen stuffs in England... and that the Poor at Norwich increased every day, so that some people in the city now pay 24s. in the pound, according to the rents of their houses.⁴

The poor rates for the city had, he claimed, increased significantly, from two to six thousand pounds annually. His estimate of the losses consequent on the import of calicos, from consumer fashion neglecting domestic stuffs, totalled £878,533, although the actual figure was in fact higher as he could not account for the total cost of *run goods*, trafficked clandestinely. Such costs were taken "from the labour of the poor... and if they were not relieved by their Lordships many hundred thousand families must perish, and in time even those very persons who are now by law obliged to contribute for their support must likewise be ruined."⁵

Although the Norwich trade had succeeded in securing the Calico Act, which helped restore the city's woollen manufactures to their position of dominance, the passing in 1736 of the so-called Manchester Act permanently affected the nation's textile trade.⁶ On the basis that the Calico Act threatened the livelihoods of those

³ Norf. RO, Rye MS 18, W. Massey, *Acta Norviciensa*, pp.1-2

⁴ NG, 7th May 1720

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ 9 Geo.II, c.4

involved in the production of linen and cotton stuffs manufactured and dyed domestically - which the Manchester cotton factors maintained was a branch of the traditional fustian trade - Parliament exempted domestically woven cottons from the statuted prohibitions.

With obstacles to their domestic retail removed, the rapid expansion of the market for cotton wares forced the Norwich textiles industry to change tack. The Norwich Committee of Trade encouraged its members to experiment with weaving cotton yarn as the manufacturing interest looked long-term at repositioning their markets, with greater emphasis on overseas exports as domestic demand contracted in the face of cheaper cotton goods.⁷ Although by the early 1750s the Norwich trade was in the middle of a period of renewed prosperity, it was still vulnerable to economic fluctuations.⁸ In addition the rapid expansion of the West Riding's manufactures, which had shifted from spinning yarn for the Norwich trade to bulk-production of lower quality worsteds like camlets and shalloons, set them up in direct competition for the increasingly important overseas markets.⁹

Since 1743 wool prices had been increasing, and was attributed by contemporary observers to the volume of wool and yarn illegally exported from England and Ireland to France. Efforts by parliament to better regulate the movement of these products had restricted maritime traffic to serving a limited number of ports. As a result most of the Irish yarn used in the Norwich stuffs had to come through Cork to Bristol, and then needed to be expensively

⁷ Gentlemen's Magazine VI (London, 1736), p.169

⁸ Arthur Young, The Farmer's Tour through the East of England vol.II (London, 1771), p.77

⁹ Pat Hudson, The Genesis of Industrial Capital (Cambridge, 1986), p.29; James, Worsted Manufacture, pp.263-4; J.H. Clapham, 'The Transference of the Worsted Industry from Norfolk to the West Riding', Economic Journal 20:78 (June 1910), pp.199-202

transported cross-country to the city.¹⁰ The Commissioners of Trade reported in 1731-2 that the additional cost of transportation from Bristol to Norwich was approximately 5% for yarn and 15% for wool.¹¹ Repeated lobbying of parliament for legislation to have the consignments shipped directly from Ireland to Great Yarmouth was eventually granted in 1752, prompted by Lancaster successfully petitioning for their own port to be opened to Irish shipping.¹²

As in previous years, in a public display of the vitality of Norwich's industry, the woolcombers staged a grand procession on the 3rd February, honouring their trade's patron-saint Bishop Blaise:

[D]rawn by four grey Stallions; next to him, Jason, bearing the Golden Fleece, and about 300 Men on Horseback, riding two and two, having on Caps and Sashes made of Wool of intermixt Colours; along with each Company, which are eleven in Number that will be Boys and Girls, representing Shepherds and Shepherdesses.¹³

In spite of such grand gestures of confidence the immediate material benefits of the change had to be offset against a sharp downturn in domestic demand for Norwich goods which affected the city's economic climate, and led Horatio Walpole to reflect that "Our Woollen Trade is in a ticklish Situation, perhaps upon the Balance of being preserved or lost".¹⁴ Such warnings reflected legitimate concerns about the economic uncertainties of the time but also served a rhetorical purpose, both in emphasising the importance of a flourishing textile trade to the interest of both nation and city, and

¹⁰ James, Worsted Manufacture, p.266

¹¹ Louis M. Cullen, Anglo-Irish Trade, 1660-1800 (Manchester, 1968), p.57

¹² 25 Geo.II, c.19

¹³ NM, 25th Jan. 1752

¹⁴ Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.315-6; The Complaints of the Manufacturers (London, 1752), p.32

as justification for adaptation and austerity within the industry itself.

2. Campaign against embezzlement

From around 1750 many of the larger merchant manufacturers of the city began looking at assuming greater direct control of their overseas export business, rather than depending on their London merchants, but in order to support the expansion of their commercial operations they faced increased demands on their financial capital.¹⁵ In order to increase profitability and sustain their growth the Norwich manufacturers attempted to introduce measures to improve production in order to reduce their costs, efforts which pre-dated the immediate economic recession. Textile producers nationally had been petitioning parliament since December 1751 to legislate against the way in which fleeces were parcelled, marking and adulterating the wool in a way which damaged it and increased the weight of the load, and causing the manufacturers to pay for more than they received.¹⁶ They emphasised to parliament and the public the amount of waste involved in the trade, and complained about what they construed as inefficient or fraudulent practices.

Informed by these concerns Thomas Hurnard used his mayoralty to commence a series of prosecutions against the embezzlement of yarn and cuts of cloth. Although there had been cases brought sporadically before this time, it is evident that within several weeks of Hurnard assuming office the magistracy was intent on using its

¹⁵ Ursula Priestley (ed.), The Letters of Philip Stannard (Norwich, 1994), pp.8-9; Richard Wilson, 'The Textile Industry', in Rawcliffe and Wilson, Norwich since 1550, pp.231-3

¹⁶ Journals of the House of Commons vol.26 (London, 1803), p.320

powers to support a more thorough programme of prosecutions. The *Norwich Mercury* reported on the 11th July that in the last week convictions had been made against three woolcombers for buying embezzled wool, and against a worsted weaver for stealing a large amount of warp and yarn from his master. A letter in the same issue intimated further that one of the men committed to gaol – “a drunken Comber”, true to type - was one of Wheatley’s deputies and a leader of the city’s Methodists, providing further indication of the moral character of their society.¹⁷

In the course of the following year a number of arrests were made for embezzlement and the malefactors whipped in the marketplace. The response of the crowd to the punishment was marked, as they abused the city officers and began pelting them with objects.¹⁸ When, on another occasion, the magistrates and officers of court attempted to bolster the officers meting out punishment, they were jostled and manhandled by the crowd. Perhaps drawing on the memory of the previous year’s events, the mob felt empowered to intervene on behalf of those who had been prosecuted as thieves.¹⁹ Letters to the paper attacked the actions of the crowds, and demanded that gentlemen repair to the marketplace to ensure that such punishment was carried out. Its end was “not the putting the Delinquents to Pain, but deterring others from committing the Offences that tend to the Hurt of the Community”.²⁰

The 1749 statute against embezzlement had been the result of lobbying by the Norwich manufacturers, and was guided through parliament by Horatio Walpole, who maintained a close relationship with the city’s merchant-manufacturers. Embezzlement was particularly widespread in the textile trades, thriving in the ‘putting

¹⁷ *NM*, 11th Jul. 1752

¹⁸ *NM*, 6th Jan. 1753

¹⁹ *NM*, 27th Jan. 1753

²⁰ *NM*, 3rd Feb. 1753

out' system, in which work was undertaken in smaller domestic workshops, and was consequently open to abuse.²¹ The wealthiest gentleman masters were part of the commercial elite of the city, and were unlikely to be heavily involved in the mechanical processes of the craft themselves. Where their workshops were not large enough to handle their workload they put out weaving and woolcombing to smaller masters and journeymen. Anecdotal evidence of the period observed that most weavers' workshops contained relatively few looms, but in the case of combing it seems to have been the norm for work to be confined to small workshops.²² These lesser master combers might employ just one journeyman or servant to assist them in their work, and it has been shown that in the preceding century there were roughly equal numbers of small masters and journeymen, so that the practical differences between them were often far less pronounced than between the great and smallest masters, with many of these lesser masters also working for wages.²³

The act extended and amended existing laws which it felt did not impose severe enough punishments for such cases of theft, and stipulated that on the oath of the goods' owners or other credible witnesses delinquents would compulsorily be confined to gaol and whipped. Originally they had hoped to extend the same punishment to anyone also found guilty of receiving embezzled goods, but objections were raised in parliament on the basis that corporal punishment was not ordinarily extended to those of some financial means, and was appropriately adjusted to a series of fines.²⁴

²¹ John Styles, 'Embezzlement, industry and the law', in Berg, Hudson and Sonenscher, Manufacture in town and country before the factory (Cambridge, 1983), p.175; John Rule, The Experience of Labour (London, 1981), p.130

²² Priestley, Letters of Philip Stannard, pp.6-7

²³ Kerridge, Textile Manufactures, p.201

²⁴ 22 Geo.II, c.27, in A Collection of Statutes vol.VIII (London, 1836), pp.193-202; James, Worsted Manufacture, p.252; Styles, 'Embezzlement', pp.192, 199

The original intent of statutes of this form was to provide a means of mediating labour relations, and the measures against embezzling went hand-in-hand with other measures regulating workers' wages and restricting trade combinations. The committee of the House of Commons which drew up the 1703 bill, to which the subsequent statutes referred, had acted in response to a petition from the journeymen weavers of Taunton, who were found to be subject to "great Difficulties and Discouragements in their Trades".²⁵ More specifically this related to the masters' employment of non-apprenticed workers, in violation of the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, and their insistence on paying their journeymen partly 'in truck', that is with goods and provisions, rather than in coin of the realm. The masters, for their part, countered that they had been losing significant amounts as a result of their journeymen embezzling yarn and fabric. Such losses could be considerable; in four cases which went to court in Norwich between 1750 and 1763 the malefactors had embezzled between 8% and 33% of the yarn supplied to them.²⁶

Whilst the 1703 bill attempted to mediate relations by rectifying the perceived abuses by all parties concerned, it achieved very limited success. Apprenticeship as a formal institution was already on the wane, although throughout the course of the century artisans consistently attempted to halt its erosion, and certainly within the West Country, payment in truck continued to be common practice during periods of recession.²⁷ In 1726 the Court of Guardians for the city workhouse had felt it necessary to pass an order restraining the overseers from paying relief to the poor in goods, rather than money, "that it may be in their Power to buy what they want in the

²⁵ Journals of the House of Commons vol.14 (London, 1803), pp.67-8

²⁶ Styles, 'Embezzlement', pp.177-8

²⁷ Patrick O'Brien, 'Central government and the economy', in Floud and McCloskey (ed.), Economic History of Britain since 1700 vol.1 (Cambridge, 2000), p.224; W.G. Hoskins, Industry, Trade and People in Exeter (Manchester, 1935), p.76

cheapest Manner".²⁸ Where wages were prone to be deferred or paid in truck it impacted directly on the one's ability to settle their credit with local retailers, whose need to maintain their own liquidity meant they required some form of security. In these situations the exchange of embezzled goods could serve as a "pledge of payment".²⁹ If in principle wages and other payments were to be made in coin alone, the eighteenth-century economy still incorporated numerous *ad hoc* settlements.

The use of truck by some employers overlapped with the worker's right to claim perquisites. Certain leftovers and offcuts from the production process were ordinarily treated as part of the labourers' income. However the use of perquisites was not restricted to situations where truck payment was usual, but was widely considered an accepted benefit for artisans in the manufacturing trades, and integral to their working wage. Certain perquisites were not called into question, such as the right of journeymen sawyers to take away the sawdust. Others were generally overlooked until an economic downturn, when a master's curtailment of such privileges seemed to fly in the face of established customary usages.³⁰

What the statutes referred to unequivocally as embezzlement can be seen to have occupied a rather more ambiguous position; what the master considered theft, might be felt by his journeyman a case of claiming his due. Historians have cautioned that projecting the fixed legal definitions of our own time onto these cases serves to obscure the disputes which took place between masters and journeymen about how these practices were interpreted.³¹ Many working people felt that the tenuous position of reciprocity and negotiation with the masters, with their relationships embedded in a

²⁸ NM, 18th Jun. 1726

²⁹ Ashton, Economic History, p.209

³⁰ Rule, Experience of Labour, pp.126-7; Styles, 'Embezzlement', pp.179, 187

³¹ Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged (London, 2006), pp.239-40

matrix of customary rights, was being progressively undermined by changes to economic practices and legal amendment. However, legislators in the 1790s remarked that the laws against embezzlement had failed in their purpose precisely because the master woolcombers and manufacturers of Norwich were so reticent about undertaking prosecutions, for fear they might “expose themselves singly to the loss attending the Resentment of the Spinners and Work People”.³²

At the time the journeymen woolcombers were particularly noted for the strength of their combinations, which their critics alleged allowed them to dictate excessively generous conditions of employment. Association was largely informal and social, and helped provide material support for their out-of-work brethren. Although the aid offered by these informal box-clubs lightened the load on the poor rates, the societies also provided a corporative presence to defend their interests. Working as a body they possessed the platform to negotiate the conditions of their employment, although such arrangements led to accusations of conspiracy:

they gave Laws to their Masters, as also to themselves, viz. that no Man should comb Wool under 2s. per Dozen; that no Master should employ any Comber that was not of their Club, if he did, they agreed one and all not to work for him.³³

The 1749 legislation had proceeded from an earlier dispute between the masters and journeymen woolcombers. Although ostensibly

³² 31 Geo.III, c.56, in The Statutes at Large (London, 1794), p.171

³³ [Thomas Cowper], A Short Essay upon Trade in General (London, 1741), p.40; John V. Orth, 'English Combination Acts of the Eighteenth Century', Law and History Review 5:1 (Spring 1987), pp.208-9; C.R. Dobson, Masters and Journeymen (London, 1980), p.45

about the employment of men in the combing trade who had not been apprenticed, the dispute turned on the journeymen's right to resist changes to working practices.³⁴ As a result the bill reiterated the illegality of their acting as a trade combination, a measure intended to strengthen the masters' bargaining position. It has been commented on before that the reality of the system of pre-factory labour relations was far from the nostalgic image of the harmonious unity of intertwined paternalism and deference represented by the Country critiques of the age and of nineteenth-century socialists alike.³⁵ The reciprocity of ordered social relations was far more conflictual than was commonly acknowledged and required continual negotiation, mediated by all parties' normative commitment to traditions of mutuality and corporate legalism, "marked by mutual constraints, bound beyond which neither party may trespass if the relationship is to remain viable."³⁶

Such commitments were based not on any presumption of equality, but on the recognition that social stability and cohesion was best secured by achieving a mutual sense of their common interest, or was at least presented in those terms. Consequently the appeals which appeared in the press against those convicted of embezzlement were framed less in terms of their crimes being committed against private property than the public good. The law was presented as a defence of trade, and of the prosperity and wellbeing of both city and nation

by which the old and decrepit are maintained, the young and vigorous employed, and all engaged in useful Services to the Community.³⁷

³⁴ James, Worsted Manufacture, p.251

³⁵ Dobson, Masters and Journeymen, p.152; Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', pp.43-9

³⁶ Joyce, Work, Society and Politics, p.124

³⁷ NM, 7th Oct. 1752

Although the 1749 act represented an effort by the larger manufacturers to change the footing on which labour relations were managed, and in spite of their dominance of the corporation, it still required them to present its implementation as congruent with the public interest and the rule of law.³⁸ With this in mind the original draft of the bill proposed the presence of two justices of the peace to ensure the impartiality of judgements. But this measure also served as the means to represent to the public that they were concerned with safeguarding justice, and thus legitimate their actions.³⁹ Increasingly the prevailing view of the state was that disputes over pay and conditions should be dealt with according to the law, formally mediated through the court and powers of petition, and extra-legal means of redress were looked at less tolerantly, although the power to dissuade them was limited.⁴⁰

Forms of associational activity were linked to the social intercourse naturally occurring between colleagues, kin and neighbours, and as such were largely informal and difficult in practice to legislate against. It fell therefore to the masters to also take action corporately as a committee, or 'counter-combination', to represent their interests in negotiating rates for work with their journeymen, as also to press for prosecutions against what they considered abuses.⁴¹

³⁸ Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', pp.43-9

³⁹ Landau, The Justices of the Peace, p.357

⁴⁰ Dobson, Masters and Journeymen, p.77

⁴¹ Ashton, Economic History, pp.210-1; Leonard N. Rosenband, 'Social Capital in the Early Industrial Revolution', in Robert I. Rotberg (ed.), Patterns of Social Capital (Cambridge, 2001), p.112; Letter from 'Senex' to The East Anglian Newspaper, quoted in James, Worsted Manufacture, p.262

3. The Woolcombers' strike

When the committee of the master woolcombers met on the 13th July at the Maid's Head Inn, just days after the first prosecutions, their first order of business was a proposal to reduce the rates for work. This immediately met with the opposition of the journeymen's representatives. One of the masters was alleged to have indignantly countered

"That the Mason's Labourer might as well say he was the Mason, or the Pickbone the Lord, as for you to say, yours is a Trade." Then with scorn and indignation said, "You are our Slaves, and we deem you as such..."⁴²

Several days later the committee met again, drafting and signing a statement for publication in which they condemned the journeymen's combinations as being not only "contrary to law, but are great infringements of our legal Rights, destructive of our natural Liberties, and inconsistent with common justice."⁴³ The statement alleged that the journeymen in combination had conspired to obstruct the discovery and prosecution of embezzlers, and announced that it would not for the future employ any combers involved. The journeymen responded in kind, disputing the claims made by the committee, and in a notice to the press stated that the actual cause of their disagreements was the masters' attempts to break the power of their society: "No, we are social Creatures, and cannot live without each other; and why should you destroy Community?"⁴⁴ Some masters, they alleged, were refusing to pay the customary wage or made payment in truck, and had been recruiting 'Colt' labour, in other words unapprenticed men.

⁴² NM, 7th Oct. 1752

⁴³ NM, 18th Jul. 1752

⁴⁴ NM, 1st Aug. 1752

Let us ask what these journeymen require?... Only that these Hostlers, Butchers, and Ploughmen might follow their own Callings, and not to rob us of our Property.⁴⁵

In a show of solidarity between three and five hundred journeymen woolcombers struck work and decamped to Rackheath, several miles outside of the jurisdiction of the city. The camp's location on the heath might itself have had some additional relevance, as part of a large area of common land which had been only partly enclosed and still functioned as a resort for the people of the city, staging horse races, boxing matches and shooting contests. The heath had also, famously, been the site of the rebels' camp during Kett's Rebellion, raised against sixteenth-century enclosures of the commons and wastes, and the site of their court which had been convened under an 'Oak of Reformation'. These events had become an integral part of the mythology of the city, and versions of Nevill's narrative were frequently republished in the course of the eighteenth-century, most recently as a 1751 pamphlet, whose opening lines restated the familiar account that events had been caused by enclosures abridging the people's economic rights to use the commons.⁴⁶ Addressed "From Rackheath", notices were sent out to the societies of other towns, and a proclamation issued for publication, defending the legitimacy of their course of action and warning workers not to come to the city in response to the masters' call for combers, as they would not be welcomed there.⁴⁷

In the public exchanges between them neither the masters nor journeymen could agree on the causes of the breakdown in their relationship, and, unable to legitimately present their dissension in

⁴⁵ NM, 25th Jul. 1752; NM, 7th Oct. 1752

⁴⁶ The History of the Rebellion in Norfolk (Norwich, 1751)

⁴⁷ NM, 25th Jul. 1752; Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 22nd Aug. 1752, ff.145-6

terms of their competing or opposing interests, could only accuse the other of misrepresentation. Their arguments shifted onto a man called Christopher Frye, a comber originally from Wellington in Somerset who had been a 'walking man' for a number of years. In Bristol he had been charged with being a Colt, having no "Right to our Trade either by Birth or Servitude", from where word was sent out to the various societies of combers around the country that he was not to be employed. Unable to secure work he arrived in Norwich in March and began with Charles Maltby, one of the committee of master woolcombers. When the notice reached the city several weeks later a number of the journeymen refused to work with him any longer. It was then that he turned informer, making allegations against about forty woolcombers for embezzlement.

At the time several of his colleagues signed a letter in his defence, apparently despite knowing he was a colt, although opinion was quickly turning against him. Another letter from Wellington, stating that he was an apprenticed member of the society there was publicly disregarded as a forgery. Once he had broken rank the retention of Frye's services by the masters, in the expectation that he would provide further names, was taken as a provocation. Confidentially the Mayor and a number of the masters spoke to the senior journeymen of the combination and confided that they had little love for the man. They proposed that if the journeymen returned to work his services would be disposed of within several weeks. What was at stake though was far more than Frye's employment, but of how to manage changes to economic practices and ultimately the question of the labour relations between masters and servants.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ NM, 1st Aug. 1752; NM, 8th Aug. 1752; NM, 28th Oct. 1752

Faced with the prospect of severe disruption to the textile trade, the Mayor's Court met on the 22nd August and issued an advertisement for general publication in the London papers, condemning the journeymen's actions and issuing an invitation to any combers to practice their trade in the city without fear of molestation.⁴⁹ Over the following weeks the court's ability to take any further action against the combination was however slowed considerably when the business of each session was impeded by scores of people appearing before them to take their freedom.

Freeman admissions, although sporadic, had been in general decline since the 1730s (Fig.1). The 1729 Norwich Elections Act had reduced the practice of buying the freedom to manipulate elections, which, alongside changing industrial practices and reduced enforcement by the corporation, tumbled over time.⁵⁰ It was alleged in the 1790s that it was common practice among woolcombers' combinations to restrain their members "from taking Apprentices (except their Eldest Sons) or extending their Number by instructing the Apprentices or Servants of their Employers."⁵¹ By limiting the numbers of men qualified to work it created a smaller pool of labour and helped maintain higher rates for work. Nineteenth-century accounts implied that such practices were also practised at this time, but there is no direct evidence of this being the case.⁵²

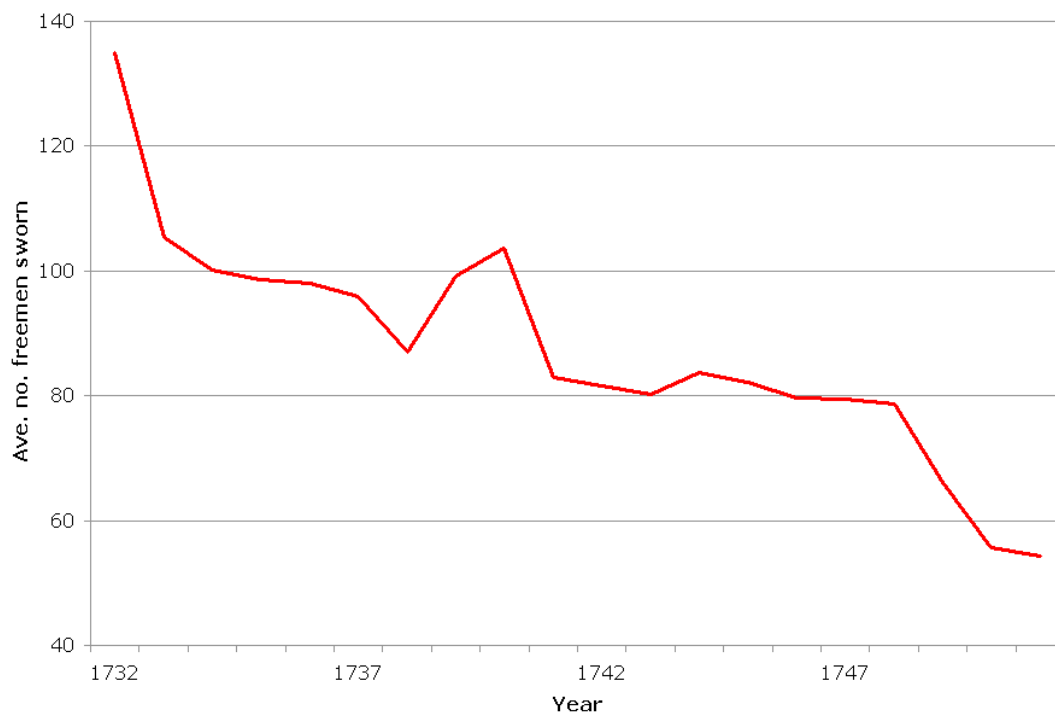
⁴⁹ The Gentlemans Magazine XXII (London, 1752), p.382; Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 22nd Aug. 1752, ff.145-6

⁵⁰ See ch.3

⁵¹ William Toplis' Petition to the House of Commons (1794), quoted in J.L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Skilled Labourer (London, 1919), p.198

⁵² James, Worsted Manufacture, pp.250-1

Fig.1 Ten year moving average of freemen sworn annually, 1732-51⁵³



Ordinarily one would expect the bulk of admissions to be from those involved in the mercantile and retail aspects of the trade, as the business activities practised by the masters were officially limited to freemen. Those whose work was solely confined to the mechanical processes of manufacture, such as the journeymen woolcombers, were not in the main expected to take up the freedom. In the decade between 1742 and 1751 admissions to the textile trades had varied from year to year, but averaged only a little over twenty people annually, accounting for approximately 38% of the total freemen admissions (Fig.2).⁵⁵

⁵³ Millican, Freemen of Norwich, 1714-1752

Fig.2 Number of freemen sworn, also showing reason claimed, 1742-51⁵⁴

Year	Freemen	Textile trades ⁵⁵	Apprenticed	Fathers free	Paid fine	Oth./Not spec.
1742	67	20	28	30	9	0
1743	76	30	13	43	17	3
1744	97	40	32	45	20	0
1745	44	13	15	23	5	1
1746	59	22	10	33	13	3
1747	60	25	15	37	8	0
1748	44	11	20	12	8	4
1749	35	25	12	17	6	0
1750	35	9	5	23	6	1
1751	26	12	12	9	5	0
	543	207	162	272	97	12

However in a period of less than two months, between the intervention of the Mayor's Court, publishing their advertisement in the London news, and the combers' return to work on the 16th of October, a total of 166 textile workers and 202 people in total, presented themselves to swear their freedom (Fig.3). By contrast, up until the session of the Mayor's Court on the 29th August only four men had appeared to take their freedom all month.⁵⁶ Following the court's advertisement, an increasing volume of people appeared at each session, with a total of 63 men having to be dealt with on

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ In order to provide a relatively stable index for comparison I have employed the term 'textile trades' here to narrowly denote only those trades concerned with the manufacturing process which were most frequently subscribed to by freemen: dyers, hotpressers, twisterers, woolcombers and weavers.

⁵⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 1st-22nd Aug. 1752, ff.144-5

the 27th September alone (Fig.4). During this period more than 82% of those who took their freedom were members of the textile trades, more than double the average ratio for the textile trades in the preceding decade (Figs. 2 and 3).

Fig.3 Freedoms sworn at Mayor's Court, 29th Aug. to 7th Oct. 1752⁵⁷

Session of Court	Appearing	Textile trades⁵⁵	Fathers free	No votes in 1761⁵⁸
29 Aug 1752	10	8	10	6
16 Sep 1752	36	32	35	15
21 Sep 1752	0	0	0	0
23 Sep 1752	32	24	32	17
27 Sep 1752	63	54	63	15
30 Sep 1752	0	0	0	0
4 Oct 1752	49	39	49	11
7 Oct 1752	12	9	12	5
	202	166	201	69

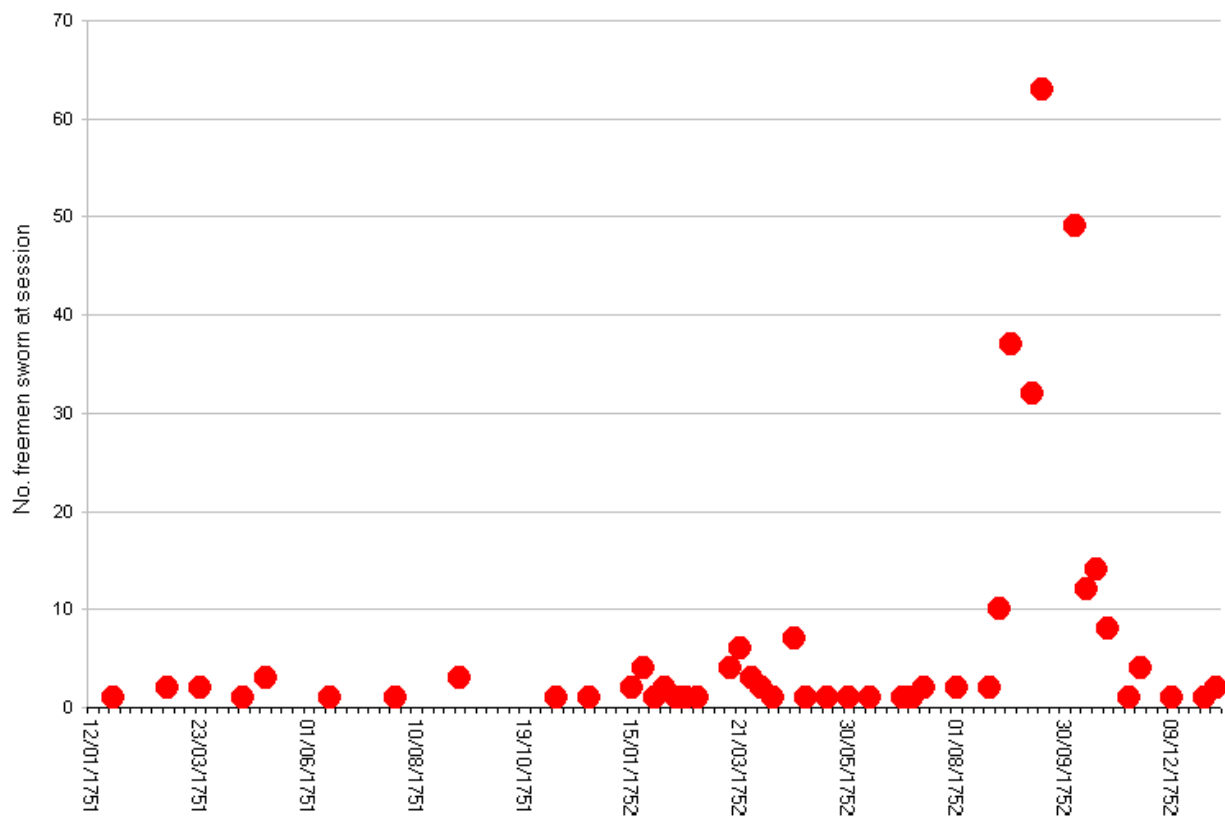
All of those who appeared in this period, bar one who had been ordered to take his freedom by the assembly, claimed entitlement to their freedom on the basis of their father having been a freeman of the city (Fig.3), and were therefore exempted from paying a fine. This contrasts with the average figures for the preceding decade, in which half of all freemen claimed it on the same reason, with the bulk of the other half having either served an apprenticeship or paid a fine to the Foreign Receiver to qualify themselves (Fig.2). The

⁵⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 29th Aug. – 7th Oct. 1752, ff.146-51

⁵⁸ Poll for Members of Parliament (Norwich, 1761)

trade that they subscribed to provides little information about their wealth or relative social position.

Fig.4 Freedoms sworn at Mayor's Court (Jan 1751 to Jan 1753)⁵⁹



Although there is no clear record of the status of the men who took the freedom during the disputes, a number were related to those few men who can be definitively identified as part of the combination, as in the case of the sons of Timothy Keymer. Keymer had been prominent in Wheatley's Methodist society, and was well-connected in the city. Although on good terms with a number of masters and manufacturers he was an important figure in the

⁵⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 12th Jan. 1751 – 20th Jan. 1753, ff.109-58

journeyman woolcombers' combination. Two of his sons who worked as combers, and another son who worked as a worsted weaver, all took up the freedom in this period.⁶⁰

One has to be careful not to read too much into such results, particularly given the lack otherwise of any detailed information about these people, but it is reasonable, given the irregularity of this behaviour, to tentatively venture a connection. The figures differ dramatically from the averages for the period, with a significantly increased proportion of men who were directly associated with the textile trades and of people claiming their freedom by right of their father's being a freeman. Although not all were necessarily presenting themselves in response to the woolcombers' dispute, given the dramatic increase in volume we can assume this was a factor in most cases.

On the session of the 16th September a total of thirty six men appeared before the court and swore their freedom. However it was recorded in the day's transactions that of this number, almost half, having claimed their right by virtue of their fathers, were subsequently found to be ineligible and would consequently have to pay a fine to qualify. After this date the qualification of those who presented themselves was first checked against the freemen records before swearing.⁶¹ We can only speculate as to whether the intent of the men's appearance at court during the course of the woolcombers' strike was to make a show of their support to the authorities, to qualify them to vote in the city's elections, or to simply obstruct the magistrates' ability to do business. The effect on the court's productivity was pronounced, engrossing almost all of

⁶⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 29th Aug. to 7th Oct. 1752, ff.146-51

⁶¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, f.147

their time, and by the 29th September a committee was appointed in order to attempt to better regulate its business.⁶²

By cross-referencing the records of voters in the 1761 parliamentary elections with the list of men who took their freedom during this two month period we can try to gain some idea of whether they subsequently used their entitlement to vote. This method has clear limitations and does not reflect whether in the intervening period they used their vote in the municipal elections for corporation representatives. But, given the high turnouts for the city's parliamentary elections, it might provide enough consistency to give us a clearer sense of their motives. Although one can make only a putative identification in most cases, based on a freeman's trade and name – allowing for variant spellings – there is sufficient information to better indicate who *did not* vote. Of the 202 men who swore the freedom in this period, at least 69 failed to vote in the 1761 parliamentary election, or a minimum of 34% of their number (Fig.3). The figure is probably greater, but where any similarity could be found I have assumed that I cannot disprove that the person voting is identical with the person taking their freedom.

Given that a period of nine years had elapsed between, some of those men might have died, were practising a different trade or had moved out of the area and did not return to vote. However as that period of time proved to be amongst the most successful for the Norwich textile manufactory, it is fair to assume the latter proportion to be comparatively low.

The relatively high rate of abstention in the 1761 election by freemen who presented themselves during the woolcombers' protests, coupled to the apparent significance of their taking the freedom as a means of influencing the magistrates' handling of the affair, seems to indicate that the right to vote in parliamentary

⁶² Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, f.150

elections was not their primary concern. Nor indeed was their formal right to vote necessary to negotiate politically with the governors of the city. The historical emphasis justly placed on the importance of the reform movement has privileged the electoral franchise and tended to overshadow the existence of other, more informal, and consequently more hazily defined, forms of political activity. The implications of these figures seems to bring the existence of such approaches to the ebb-and-flow of relations between governors and governed, masters and journeymen, more clearly into focus.

4. Traditions of artisanal independence

In October, after eleven weeks of disrupted production, the masters again met the representatives of the journeymen and proposed that if they were to return to work there would be no reduction in their wage rates. With autumn drawing in, and their "Rights of Trade" secured for the time being, the offer was unanimously agreed, and all resumed work by the 16th of the month, with the voluntary contributions received from the public for their subsistence whilst on strike divided equally between them.⁶³ Keymer, in a notice published in the *Norwich Mercury*, thanked the generosity of their "Friends and Benefactors", assuring them that they returned to work not from necessity, but to provide no grounds for complaint against them, and show the world that they were "none of those idle Fellows, which it has been wickedly suggested we are".⁶⁴ The combers had received support during the strike from journeymen across different trades, principally but not exclusively from the textile manufactures, as illustrated by the range of trades who took

⁶³ *The Gentlemans Magazine* XXII (London, 1752), p.476; *NM*, 28th Oct. 1752

⁶⁴ *NM*, 28th Oct. 1752

the freedom in increased numbers during the disputes.⁶⁵ Despite the worst fears of their critics they maintained that their aim was not to level distinctions of rank and hierarchy, and in the case of the Masters'

Right of employing who they please, having a legal Right to the Trade, we always acquiesced with it, for it is well known how many Strangers have been employed by them in this City, when Natives with Families have been in a starving Condition for want of Work; but if he means a Right of causing Butchers, Hostlers, Ploughmen, and Masons being taught to Comb, and then to have as much Right as we, this we absolutely deny, as being unlawful and unnatural, for our Laws have effectually provided against such Bastards of Trade.⁶⁶

The rights and privileges of the woolcomber were secured by apprenticeship, an institution which they consistently presented in terms of its servitude. However, once qualified the journeyman was able to claim a degree of independence in his ability to contract for work with the masters. The division of labour into self-contained craft processes privileged a strong sense of responsibility and artisanal identity. This attitude often stood in direct contrast to some of the masters, who conceived their working relationship more in terms of a position of dependent service. As such the relevance of the dispute was not restricted to the woolcombers but bore directly on labour relations and the conditions of service. Consequently they were able to elicit the support of other journeymen, most obviously the weavers, whose own position was comparable.

⁶⁵ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/31, Mayor's Court Book, 29th Aug. to 7th Oct. 1752, ff.146-51

⁶⁶ NM, 28th Oct. 1752

Criticism of the journeymen drew on a set of stereotyped characterisations to impugn their moral fibre and virtue. Their enemies emphasised that their motivations were self-serving, rather than for the public benefit of the improvement of trade. It was common to represent the woolcombers as idle and drunken, and a survey of the literature surrounding the disputes shows this allegation was reiterated several times, obviously striking deeply enough to warrant denials by Keymer amongst others.⁶⁷ Although these slights were obviously intended to cast doubt on the journeymen's actions it also served another purpose, which was the implicit critique of the capacity for abuse in the existing system of labour.

The system of putting-out work meant that the journeyman often undertook labour in his own domestic space and had, within the terms agreed with the master, a degree of control over when he worked. The description of Timothy Keymer's working environment, gleaned from his own contribution to the pamphlet exchanges of the period, provides a brief glimpse at how this system was practically set up. His family's domestic living rooms and the ground floor entrance to the street were situated on two lower floors of the house they rented, with the comb shop on the large upper or attic floor room, where two of his children also had their beds. During the day he worked in the comb shop with one or more of his sons, but was free to break from work if called on, or if he had other business to attend to.⁶⁸ This arrangement is supported by analysis of Norwich probate inventories, which have shown that after the late seventeenth-century garrets were often used as workrooms or

⁶⁷ NM, 30th Sep. 1752

⁶⁸ Keymer, The Fawning Sycophant Display'd, pp.9-10; Wheatley, A Reply, p.18

warehouses. Textile workers in particular were more likely to use the uppermost floor as they were better lit, and more open.⁶⁹

It can be seen from this brief sketch of his working arrangements that there was little capacity for the master to scrutinise what their artisan was doing. A greater degree of responsibility fell to the comber, and afforded him more control over how he employed his time. This flexibility could facilitate taking on additional work for other masters, embezzling wool or in using his time for something other than completing his work. Contemporary advertisements for a 'Norwich Weavers' Alarum' played on the theme that weavers, and other textile workers whose labour was organised through a putting out system, were responsible for managing their own time.⁷⁰ Whilst the stereotype of the drunken woolcomber may have been well established, and in part might have been attributable to the intemperate reputation of the Blaise's Day processions, the way that it was repeated gave voice to an insinuation that woolcombers abused the latitude of the putting out system to drink on the job, and neglect their work.⁷¹

Although abuses undoubtedly occurred, such claims represented the deliberate denigration of the forms of discipline and artisanal independence which were invested in the system of putting out. Such criticism should be considered as anticipating the efforts of industrial modernisers like Samuel Bentham to improve the superintendence of the manufacturing process, reducing embezzlement and imposing new forms of time-discipline on labour

⁶⁹ Ursula Priestley, P.J. Corfield and Helen Sutermeister, 'Rooms and room use in Norwich housing, 1580-1730', Post Medieval Archaeology 16 (1982), pp.117-8

⁷⁰ James, Worsted Manufacture, p.262

⁷¹ R.T. Hampson, Medii Aevi Kalendarium vol.I (London, 1841), p.157

relations, changes which would ultimately become solidified in the factory system.⁷²

Given Timothy Keymer's experience of lay-leadership and organisation with the Methodist society, it prompts the question of whether this influenced the strategies adopted by the journeymen's combination. It has been observed that through the experience of ordinary men and women assuming leadership roles in societies and bands Methodism "was serving despite itself as a model of other organizational forms."⁷³ Keymer certainly seemed to have taken a leading role in the organisation of the protest, and was party to negotiations with the magistrates and the committee of the masters. Whilst it was the case that later developments in Methodism provided a stimulus for the development of the early labour movement, it would be a stretch to attribute the 1752 actions by the woolcombers to the example of Wheatley's society. The protests, whilst stamping their own character on proceedings, used methods which were familiar from similar labour disputes by other motivated and relatively influential trade societies. Most prominent among these was the case of the London tailors, who had been involved in a long-running stand-off with their masters, and their affairs had been well publicised in the regional and national press earlier in the year.

However, following the drawn-out paper-war which fuelled the arguments caused by Wheatley's preaching in the city, it is noticeable that the dispute between masters and journeymen was played out very publicly in the pages of the local press. There was a willingness by both sides to engage with the use of print to publicise their disagreements, both to elicit support for their cause, but also

⁷² E.P. Thompson, 'Time and Work-Discipline', in Customs in Common, pp.370-94; Linebaugh, The London Hanged, pp.371-401. Jeremy Bentham's plans for Samuel's panopticon included applying its system of inspection to put unskilled paupers to work. Jeremy Bentham, Works vol.IV (Edinburgh, 1843), p.60

⁷³ Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, p.47

use the medium to legitimate it in terms of the public interest. Unlike disputes over matters of private worship this was not a matter which could be moderated by claims to liberty of conscience. Keymer's willingness to use publication in this way was further marked when he was later involved in publishing several pamphlets following his estrangement from Wheatley and the Methodist society.

5. Economic change and the reception of Methodism

The accusations of vagrancy made against Wheatley and the Methodist preachers were not made haphazardly, but were informed by a long-standing discourse which recognised the itinerancy of the vagrant as creating a class of marginal 'masterless men'. Although performing an important economic function as a source of mobile surplus labour these people also threatened the primarily sedentary logic of social relations.⁷⁴

The persistence of the moral criticism of vagrant labour and the continued force of the labour laws against vagrancy were employed by authorities as measures to control the flow of mobile labour, and maintain a balance between mobility and social order, ensuring that welfare costs did not fall too heavily to the city's rate payers.⁷⁵ Between 1740 and 1762 the picture of the official removal of vagrants and paupers from the city to their last place of settlement shows that 39.5% came from Norfolk and Suffolk, and a further 14.8% from elsewhere in East Anglia and the East Midlands, about a

⁷⁴ A.L. Beier, Masterless Men (London, 1985); Leo Lucassen, 'Eternal Vagrants? State Formation, Migration and Travelling Groups', in Lucassen, Willems & Cottaar, Gypsies and Other Itinerant Groups (Basingstoke, 1998)

⁷⁵ Nicholas Rogers, 'Vagrancy, Impressment and the Regulation of Labour', in Lovejoy and Rogers (ed.), Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World (Ilford, 1994), p.111

hundred miles distant from Norwich. However 45% of those transported had travelled to the city from London and the rest of the country.⁷⁶

However, as Keymer had emphasised during the woolcombers' dispute, the employment of 'walking men' or 'strolling men' was ordinarily tolerated, as long as they had been apprenticed and worked within the rules and forms of protection offered by the trade societies. It commonly became a source of contention only where work went to "those Bastards of Trade", trained up quickly by the masters to match demand rather than serving a formal term of apprenticeship.⁷⁷ Such strategies by the masters helped create a more flexible and disposable labour force and kept down rates of work. However such a policy also breached the Elizabethan Statute of Artificers, which remained on the statute books throughout this period, although not always enforced by the authorities.

Chambliss' analysis of vagrancy observed that where it was felt to be ill-suited to the social or economic conditions, authorities were responsible for choosing not to apply the law.⁷⁸ However such interpretations of the application of the law were not necessarily shared by all, and could consequently become a source of contention as to how the good of the community or of trade was construed. In the early 1750s, amidst concerns about the effects of the wide-ranging changes, considered as part of the ongoing process of eighteenth-century state formation, on settled social and economic relationships, mobile labour and Methodists alike were

⁷⁶ Corfield, Social and Economic History, pp.174-5. The figures, drawn from incomplete records of 433 removals, are not necessarily representative of overall levels of migration into the city, as women and families were disproportionately more likely to be deported, with fears of bastardy and pauper families being foisted on the poor rates.

⁷⁷ NM, 28th Oct. 1752

⁷⁸ William J. Chambliss, 'A Sociological Analysis of the Law of Vagrancy', Social Problems 12:1 (Summer, 1964), p.76

represented as corrosive to the integrity and stability of the community.

On one level Methodism's puritanical rigour towards practices which smacked of profanity was perceived as divisive, and their calls for reform self-consciously distanced them from the mainstream of local community. The Methodists' reforming zeal brought them into direct conflict with the continuance of a number of the customary forms of communal life.⁷⁹ The moral commitments demanded of its members were quite extensive, with an active role required in attending their meetings and an expectation of adopting an ascetic discipline. Consequently the fellowship they offered was discretionary and insular, and could come into conflict with, and even supplant, allegiances to their church, parochial community or the fellowship of a trade society.

Implicit also in the criticism made of Methodism's organisation and its pattern of outdoors preaching was a critique of itinerancy familiar to the period. By functioning outside of the highly localised relations of the parish,

tended by itinerant agents, whose origins were unknown, whose persons were obscure, and who appeared to have no formal authorisation whatsoever. They were totally unamenable to the normal, localised social controls of squire or parson.⁸⁰

What the Methodists offered then, was a largely delocalised vision of community. Although originally only intended to supplement the work of the church, the circuits of religious societies created by Methodism represented an alternative to the sedentary parochialism of the church. Its use of itinerant lay-preachers and the practice of

⁷⁹ Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, pp.158-9

⁸⁰ Walsh, 'Methodism and the Mob', p.218

open-air field preaching represented obvious sources of dislocation, out of the confines of the fabric of the church or chapel, but also moving beyond the boundaries of the parish or diocese. As E.P. Thompson identified, when population mobility increased later in the century, Methodism was well equipped to provide some sense of community, men and women integrated into the dispersed, delocalised Methodist network.⁸¹ This itinerant organisation, which as Halevy acutely observed, closely resembled the expanding commercial networks of the period,⁸² was for some associated with more general forces of change, and made it a target for what has been usefully described by Snell as a form of xenophobia.⁸³

During a period when settled economic practices, rooted in relationships of reciprocal obligation and conceived of in terms of established custom, were coming under increasing pressure and were being progressively displaced by a system of wage-labour, the position of many labouring people had become unstable. Many of these customary prerogatives were entailed on a parochial, localised basis as particular usages, and their continuity provided a foothold for negotiation in a period of dramatic economic change.⁸⁴ The poorest, without trades and apprenticeships, or who were part of the less prosperous and well organised trades, were dependent to a greater degree on the localised structures and limited rights offered by the city or parish. For many of these people Methodism represented both a reformer of popular customs and an agent for deterritorialised changes which threatened to subsume localism and its distinctive calendar and practices, along with its attendant customary privileges.

⁸¹ Thompson, Making of the English Working Class, pp.416-7

⁸² Halevy, The Birth of Methodism, p.72

⁸³ K.D.M. Snell, 'The culture of local xenophobia', Social History 28:1 (January 2003), p.27

⁸⁴ Newby, 'The Deferential Dialectic', p.157

Even allowing for a measure of openness to 'foreigners', Norwich was still largely dependent on native labour, and mobile surplus labour destabilised the security of a protectionist system which provided them with some measure of security. For the journeymen who were associated to a trade society, their localism was perhaps less of an obvious issue, as they had some degree of freedom to travel for work and still rely on the 'good fellowship' of their fellows. These societies and structures of apprenticeship provided the kind of security to defend their customary privileges, and even provided limited financial benefits for those who were out of work. However many of the practices encouraged by Methodism seemed at odds with the integrity of the structure of the artisanal trades. If the Methodists' practices provided the means to redraw the context of certain social interactions, it seemed to do so at the expense of dislocating and alienating the locus of authority.

In the case of journeymen or small masters like Timothy Keymer, their workshop was a domestic arrangement, in which they were often in part dependent on the labour of their families to serve them. Keymer described how one of his younger sons assisted him in the process of combing, and work on this scale still required either a single journeyman or servant alongside them.⁸⁵ Economic realities meant that the artisan was dependent on his family to assist and provide ancillary labour to supplement the household income.⁸⁶ The Methodists, by seeming to unsettle the balance of social relations, and in particular of the family, threatened to strike a blow not just at their position as head of the household, but at the financial wellbeing of the household itself, at a time when small, domestic units of production and the status of artisans were being

⁸⁵ Keymer, *The Fawning Sycophant Display'd*, pp.9-10

⁸⁶ Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, & Family* (London, 1989), pp.43-60; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches* (Berkeley and L.A., 1995), pp.13-24

threatened by the merchant-manufacturers' attempts at placing labour relations on a different footing.

The strength of Norwich's artisanal culture was supported by a division of labour which invested a degree of independence in the journeymen and smaller masters, and afforded them both the confidence and bargaining power to be able to negotiate with the counter-combination of the merchant-manufacturers. The relationship between the journeymen and masters did not permit representing their disagreements in terms of opposing sets of economic interests. Rather, both sides appealed to the shared interests of the trade and the community in order to legitimise their claims. They were expected to present themselves in such a way as was mediated by the reciprocal, if unequal, nature of their relationship, and demanded at least a nominal commitment to their respective roles in the social hierarchy. If these positions of paternalist responsibility and deference in actuality involved a far greater degree of disagreement and negotiation, this was not a fact which was likely to be acknowledged openly. However, by this I do not wish to imply that the idea of the integrity of the local community was solely an expedient fiction. On the contrary, for many, if not all, it provided a genuine source of stability, identity and affection, but it was a far more complex and contested idea than the image presented of it.

The 1749 statute against embezzlement, secured by the city's merchant manufacturers and policed by the city's magistracy, represented an attempt to reposition those economic relationships, and in some measure supplant the more informal give-and-take of such reciprocal settlements. However the 1752 campaign of prosecutions foundered, as it exacerbated divisive social tensions by seemingly violating the normative mutual compacts expected of the city's governance. As the legislators forty years later commented,

the actual failure of the laws to successfully tame the workers' combinations was largely the result of subsequent unwillingness on the part of Norwich's manufacturers to prosecute.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ 31 Geo.III, c.56, in Statutes at Large, p.171

CHAPTER SIX – Bread Riots and Civic Governance

1. Outline

In the previous chapter I attempted to show how by the middle of the eighteenth-century the complex skein of economic, social and political changes which we might loosely describe as part of an ongoing process of state formation, destabilised some of the settled practices which governed people's day-to-day lives. One of the effects of these disruptions was to mobilise people in defence of the rights, perquisites and usages which were treated as integral to their communal life.

The appeal to the public interest of the community was a component of the kind of paternalist governance expected of the city's governors. In order for any such claims to act on behalf of the community to be recognised as legitimate, they needed to be represented in a particular way. Consequently in this chapter I will look at the events around the 1766 bread riots in Norwich, and examining how they were motivated by a similar defence of customary expectations: in this case, of the city magistrates' commitment to legislate against dearth and famine. Sources locate the city's economic peak as a manufacturing power in the first half of the 1760s, so the end of the Seven Years War, and the subsequent retrenchment and repositioning of trade in the period that followed represented the beginning of a gradual contraction in the market for Norwich textiles.¹ Any response to a diminution in trade would scarcely have been aided by the need to increase wages in face of price inflation for provisions.

¹ This date for Norwich's "famous era" apparently originated in Arthur Young, The Farmer's Tour of the East of England (London, 1771), pp.76-7 and was reiterated in James, Worsted Manufacture.

A combination of factors led to the rise in food prices in 1766. Weather conditions over the course of the preceding year had caused poor harvests, which coupled with the failure of the government to legislate against the exportation of corn, and the retention of a bounty on its export led to domestic shortages. In the year leading up to the events at the end of September there had been anxiety regarding the national state of affairs, reflected in the printed coverage of the time. An embargo was placed on exports of grain from the 26th February until the 26th August, in expectation that the harvest would help lower prices by boosting the supply of provisions, and the government continued to monitor the price of grain and bread in the localities. However in spite of the threat of widespread harvest failure Parliament was prorogued, and the government left in relative paralysis.

Rioting had broken out two months earlier in the textile regions of south-west England, around Exeter, and spread as far east as Newbury before dying out. There was then a hiatus of about six weeks before events came again to a head across numerous locations. According to the sympathetic readings offered by E.P. Thompson and George Rudé, rioting represented not mere criminality and plunder, but is more productively interpreted in terms of social protest.² If not political in any explicit sense, rioting actually provided a semi-legitimate platform for the redress of social grievances. If, as has been maintained throughout this study, power is better understood less as a top-down process than as involving greater negotiation, then riot had the capacity to work as a form of communal sanction by those who might otherwise have been excluded from any process of formal political representation. The governors' right to rule also rested to some extent on their own

² Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', pp.188-9

ability to justify their claims in that regard, and popular normative ideas about governance circumscribed how they ruled.³

Central to the riot, according to this interpretation, was the claim to legitimation for their actions, capable of authorising the crowd to act in defence of a moral consensus. What Thompson denoted by the term *moral economy* rested on the consensus, real or supposed, expressed by customary economic practices and expectations of paternalistic governance.⁴ In fact, the weakening of this consensus might itself have been instrumental in the incidence of disorder, as where certain explanations and remedies of dearth were shared across the social spectrum it

allowed the poor to manipulate the fears of their betters through formal petitions and indirect threats in order to galvanize them into action, to persuade them to fulfil those moral and legal obligations in defence of the weak which legitimized their authority.⁵

As has been detailed in the case of the anti-Methodist rioting of 1752, it was ordinarily only where the authorities were felt to have been unresponsive, or negligent in that duty of care implicit to the reciprocal logic of paternalism, that disorder was liable to occur.⁶ The expansion of the national market and its underlying logic ate away at the localised foundations of paternalist governance and corporative responsibility, so that whilst not displacing it entirely, it lessened the receptiveness of the magistracy to such appeals to customary morality.

Simon Renton's account of the Norwich riots seems to be correct in following Thompson's emphases in analysing the crowd's actions in

³ Thompson, 'Patricians and Plebs', pp.16-96

⁴ Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', p.188

⁵ Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth and the social order', p.32

⁶ See ch.4

terms of a defence to the 'moral economy' and enforcing customary expectations about how they should be governed.⁷ Renton's account is also largely correct in discerning widespread continued support for corporative policies characterised as paternalist, although my own reading of the sources indicates that the appeal to its rhetoric instrumentally provided the basis of a potent critique of the city's corporation, and consequently should not necessarily be taken at face value.⁸

Rudé estimated that about two-thirds of all eighteenth-century riots were connected to food shortages, and can be characterised as 'hunger riots' or 'bread riots'. However, we also need to be careful about how far we generalise about the nature of the bread riot, as he warned of the danger of treating the crowd as "a pure abstraction or inchoate mass".⁹ Whilst we should not lose sight of the centrality to the incidence of these disturbances of the rising cost of staple foodstuffs, and signally of bread and grain, which formed the basis of most poor people's diets, events are often far more complex, and were not *spasmodic* responses to hunger, what Thompson referred to as "rebellions of the belly".¹⁰

Varying interests and motives could be represented in a single crowd, and whilst the driving force behind disturbances might have been a reaction to the threat of dearth, the trigger which set events in motion could have been some other, and seemingly unrelated, political or social circumstance. The script for the pattern of events that unfolded differed from one crowd to another, just as individual responses within a crowd varied. The most visible, like John and Robert Royce in the Norwich riots, were those *active* in the crowd,

⁷ Simon Renton, 'The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort in the Eighteenth Century', in Randall and Charlesworth (ed.), Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest (Liverpool, 1996), pp.115-36

⁸ Ibid., pp.133-4

⁹ George Rudé, The Crowd in History (London, 1981), p.237

¹⁰ Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', pp.185-9

in acts of destruction, or represented as 'captains' leading the riot. What underpinned the riot as a force for social protest however was a consensual 'generalised belief' unifying the crowd behind a single aim or slogan, and licensing their actions.¹¹

The official language used to refer to events made the usual claims that the mob rose only under pretence of the high price of corn, disregarding out of hand any popular claims to moral legitimation. However the response of the city's governors, its civic elite and the corn merchants and millers belies that rhetoric, making much of their public spirit and largesse, and organising a corporative response to relieve the city's poor. What is visible in the aftermath of the riots is that, in spite of ongoing efforts to devalue customary appeals to principles of paternalism or to a 'moral economy,' it was an enormously forceful means of representing the public interest, and one which could be co-opted to a quite different end, in order to articulate the political ambitions of the city's middling tradesmen.

2. Outbreak of the riot

In the early afternoon of Saturday 27th September 1766 the comings and goings of the market were disrupted when a group of about twenty or more people began to overturn the panniers, or *peds*, from which the local farmers sold their meat, eggs, butter, fruit and vegetables. As word of the disruptions to the market reached the Mayor and several of the aldermen, in session at the Guildhall, they came out and ordered the people to disperse and return to their homes. In spite of their demands the disturbances continued unabated and the magistrates retreated to the Guildhall. If the crowd had initially targeted the ped market where the

¹¹ Rudé, The Crowd in History, pp.245-6

'country people' sold their provisions, as the unrest spread they moved on to the stalls belonging to the citizenry, throwing their produce to the ground.¹² Several constables and the sergeants at mace attempted to intervene, but were ill-equipped to assert themselves when so outnumbered.

Within a couple of hours events in the marketplace had run their course, but the crowd failed to disperse, and moved on, their numbers swelling as they made their way west to the site of the city's mills. The New Mills sat on the river by Heigham gates, on the western edge of the city, having been rebuilt by the authorities at the beginning of the eighteenth-century to provide the city's water. It held a monopoly on the milling of corn in the city's limits, so that anyone, from the large commercial bakers to small householders had to pay them in order to produce their flour. By the time that the crowd arrived at the mills it had swelled in size to about a hundred people, many of whom brandished clubs, sticks and missiles. One of the millers, who lived and worked there, was present when the crowd arrived and was subsequently able to identify a labourer, Robert Royce, as prominent amongst the rioters.¹³ Carrying in his hand a baker's sign he had broken off, he *hallowed* and spurred on the crowd, calling aloud "Who will begin first?" As Royce struck out at the shutters of the mill house, the rioters followed suit by throwing up a volley of stones, breaking the windows. Once the crowd started smashing the windows "the madness and fury of the rioters" forced the millers to flee.¹⁴

The town cryer went to the Mills to see what was happening, and found the crowd engaged in pulling down the fabric of the mills, having already stripped much of the furniture and moveable goods

¹² Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.47-8, 51; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/2, Rex vs. John Corbett

¹³ Ibid., f.35

¹⁴ Ibid., ff.30, 34-38

from the buildings. He identified John Royce, Robert's father, as taking a leading role, and heard him call out to the crowd "Damn it Boys you do your work well Pull them down to the ground" as he egged them on.¹⁵ The roofs of the buildings were largely stripped of tiles, the doors broken open, and all the household goods and clothes destroyed or stolen. Partitions were torn out of the house and destroyed, and part of a wall pulled down. More than two hundred sacks of flour and meal had been spoilt, spilt and thrown into the river, as well as a significant quantity of wheat, and the milling machinery had been badly damaged. The pumps for the city waterworks had been similarly damaged, and various "seales, beams, weights, cart and other things" had been thrown into the river.¹⁶

At the time of the last bread riots in the city in July 1740 a large crowd, estimated at almost a thousand, had forced the bakers to sell their corn "at an underprice" that they deemed more reasonable, later breaking into the Mills and stealing a large quantity of grain.¹⁷ Whilst this pattern of seizing provisions and regulating their price for resale, took place in the riots at Honiton, Exeter, Newbury, Evesham, Wallingford and elsewhere, Norwich had no such incidents.¹⁸ Rather what emerges was a rather more convulsive pattern of grain being discarded or destroyed. This deliberate wastage smacks of bearing a certain gestural or symbolic weight, rather than redistributing it for consumption. Eyewitness accounts described rioters covering themselves in meal, flour and dirt, which helped disguise them from identification, but also helped to mark them out, and might have been intended as the

¹⁵ Ibid., ff.35, 38

¹⁶ Ibid., ff.34-6; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/9/3, Depositions of Witnesses

¹⁷ TNA, Secretaries of State: State Papers Domestic, SP 36/51, John Nuthall to Duke of Newcastle, 7th Jul. 1740, f.265; Blomefield, Norwich, p.317

¹⁸ Gentleman's Magazine XXXVI (London, 1766), pp.386-8, 437-8

visual aspect of adopting a certain theatrical role.¹⁹ Such cases were taken by Thompson as the best evidence to disprove the 'spasmodic' conception of the bread riot, as the crowd's motive was clearly not to feed themselves, but seemingly to humiliate and punish those they perceived to have transgressed the standards of the moral economy.²⁰

Intelligence of these proceedings was transmitted back to the Mayor and magistrates at the Guildhall, who made the decision to read the Riot Act to the crowd.²¹ It was only at this stage of proceedings that Francis Wright, the town clerk, was directed to transcribe a copy of the 1715 Riot Act from the printed statutes and to accompany the Mayor - in his capacity as Justice of the Peace - and magistrates, supported by constables drawn from several wards, to the New Mills where he was to read the act.²² This rather drawn-out process of the transcription and the reading of the Act to the crowd was central to the intervention by the authorities, and was a necessary component of the rubric of the Act.

The Riot Act was introduced in the first year of King George I, and formally codified the means to legislate against any crowd "being unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace". The Act stipulated that a standard proclamation be read to the crowd by a justice of the peace, commanding them "with a loud voice" to disperse peacefully. If, after an hour, they persisted then they would be "adjudged felons, and shall suffer death" without benefit of clergy. Moreover if

¹⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.49; Thompson, Whigs and Hunters, p.27; Alun Howkins and Linda Merricks, "'Wee be black as hell': ritual, disguise and rebellion' Rural History 4 (1993), pp.41-53

²⁰ Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', pp.231-2

²¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.38, 51, 53

²² *Ibid.*, ff.51, 53-4

they “unlawfully, and with force demolish and pull down” any building they would similarly be capitally judged felons.²³

It had been an explicitly political piece of legislation, designed to strengthen the hand of the new monarchy and its allies against popular Jacobite opposition. Its form removed certain discretionary powers invested in juries as to how they chose to prosecute acts of riot, and consolidated legal authority in the judiciary.²⁴ However the execution of the Riot Act was frequently a source of considerable confusion, for public and magistracy alike were often unsure as to how it was to be correctly employed. That uncertainty was apparent in the prosecutions that followed the riots, when they were unable to determine John Royce’s guilt, according to the letter of the law, on the basis that he had only incited the riots, and the case was passed to the Court of King’s Bench.²⁵

Before the Mayor’s party could reach the crowd gathered near the Mills the mass of people pushed towards them, driving them back. The magistrates were pelted with stones and broken bricks, with one missile striking Wright’s leg and injuring him. Forced into the New Mills Yard the Mayor’s party made their escape through a back entrance into the common street. Wright was unable to catch up with them “before it was sealed off by volleys of missiles, so remained in the yard until the mob dispersed”, and eventually made his own way back to Town Hall where the magistrates were gathered.²⁶ The magistrates subsequently commented that they believed that the crowd’s assault on them had been a deliberate effort to “wilfully and knowingly oppose and obstruct the... Justices

²³ 1 Geo.I st.2 c.5, The Riot Act quoted in E.N. Williams, The Eighteenth Century Constitution (Cambridge, 1960), pp.414-7

²⁴ Rogers, Whigs and Cities, p.30

²⁵ Norf. RO, WLS LV/41, 428X5, Rex vs. John Royce; Sir James Burrow, Reports of the Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Court of King’s Bench, vol.IV (Dublin, 1794), pp.2073-86

²⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.37-8, 51-5

of the Peace for the s[ai]d City in going to proclaim" the Riot Act.²⁷ Sheriff Thomas Starling, accompanied by a company of constables, went out from the Guildhall to make a second attempt at reading the Act to the crowd.

As events at the Mills exhausted themselves the crowd had drifted off in several smaller groups which made their way across the city, with bouts of disorder breaking out throughout the evening. When the sheriff's party reached the Mills they faced some resistance, but succeeded in reading the Act aloud at the gates from Heigham Street and again in the yard nearby the rioters. The company proceeded in the wake of the dispersed crowd, repeating the proclamation at multiple locations throughout the city.²⁸ The largest part of the crowd had moved on to the nearby home and malting house of John Clover, a grain merchant, which lay a short walk from the Mills. They threw missiles at the building, smashing the window panes, and damaging furniture inside before they moved on.²⁹ Clover been a master baker for a number of years but his commercial activities were now as a grain merchant and maltster, with several malthouses in and around the city.³⁰

As is characteristic of bread riots the principal targets for the rioters' disaffection were the retailers and middlemen who supplied the city with its grain and bread: millers, maltsters, grain factors and, most prominently, the bakers. During the eighteenth-century many bakers' business had diversified and in addition to baking they carried out related jobs, as in the case of Robert Elvin, who had a mill on Mousehold Heath, and John Clover, who had made the transition from baker to maltster and merchant.³¹ Throughout the

²⁷ Ibid., ff.52-3, 55

²⁸ Ibid., ff.55-6

²⁹ Ibid., f.44; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/4, Rex vs. Thomas Lighting

³⁰ NM, 18th Oct. 1766

³¹ Ray B. Westerfield, Middlemen in English Business (New York, 1968), p.175; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.2; NM, 18th Oct. 1766

evening the mobs made their way around the city, calling at bakers' premises on their way, breaking down their signs and shutters and smashing their shop windows.³² One baker, visited by the rioters shortly after the events at the Mills, had his shop windows smashed, only to be revisited later that evening by others who set about the bare window frames.³³ Most of the bakers visited that evening attempted to reason with the crowd. One, enquiring what the crowd wanted with him, was answered "We had better be hanged than starved."³⁴

Another proprietor attempted to bargain with them, asking "My boys what do you want here in money bread and beere", but John Royce called back "God damn your eyes and limbs, take no Bribes - throw away Boys, kick down his beer".³⁵ Attempts by another baker to pacify them with two pails of beer were refused in a similar fashion, the beer thrown away and the baker's windows broken.³⁶ When James Bunn Jr, a lawyer, heard that the crowd was on St. Martin's Plain he rushed to his father's bakery in the adjacent parish. He arrived in time to reason with the mob who had arrived there, and believed that he was making some headway in dissuading them from attacking the premises. His father offered to give them whatever they wanted, "money or anything else", as long as they left him in peace. However John Royce urged them "Take no bribes, knock all down", and they immediately began to break the shop windows, rallying others who followed his lead, smashing the glass and throwing what bread they found onto the street.³⁷

Across these incidents John Royce's repeated rallying cry to the crowd, "Take no bribes," was prominent as a slogan able to knit

³² Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.39-43, 46

³³ Ibid., ff.13-4

³⁴ Ibid., f.41

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., ff.1-2

³⁷ Ibid., ff.39-40

events together, and unify the motives of the crowd.³⁸ The events which followed on the Saturday night seem to break with this pattern however, and serve to remind that once mobilised, that licence which underwrote riot as protest or the expression of social grievances, could be diverted in other ways. Once violent disorder had been unleashed it could be expressed in different forms, revealing the various motives which found common expression, or had been subsumed, in the rhetoric of the crowd.

3. Disorder and violence

Hours after most of the crowd had dispersed, at about ten or eleven at night, a group of twenty to thirty people congregated at Edward Rudge's bakery, by the Haymarket in the centre of the city. They set about the shop windows and shutters, and a number of them forced their way inside, where they confronted Rudge's household. Rudge's servant succeeded in prevailing on them to leave the shop and accompany him to the White Horse alehouse, opposite the bakery, where he promised that Mr. Rudge would arrange to pay for anything there that they wanted. The alehouse was shut when they arrived, but the party knocked on the shutters until the alehouse keeper opened up and let them in, assured that they should be brought whatever they ordered at Rudge's expense.³⁹ As they were being served they continued to behave in a disorderly fashion, snatching pots of beer from Elizabeth Taverner, the serving woman, and several of the rioters dragged a leg of mutton around the parlour floor. Some of them started to break the plates, declaring to the landlord Beckett that he should charge Rudge for them. When constables intervened and tried to persuade the rioters to disperse

³⁸ Ibid., ff.39-43

³⁹ Ibid., ff.12-3, 48; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/2, Rex vs. John Corbett

and go home the mob responded angrily, and began to smash up the place and steal the drink.⁴⁰

Beckett's infirm wife Susanna, who had been confined to her sick bed in the back parlour, was roused by the sound of breaking glass. Shortly afterwards she heard some of them say "They want to murder the landlord... and tear him limb from limb". The rioters broke the glass windows and doors, and when she started screaming for help her husband carried her, undressed, from her bed to a neighbour's house where she stayed until dawn.⁴¹ When the violence had broken out Elizabeth Taverner and her husband had fled upstairs to their lodgings and hidden under their bed. When members of the mob came upstairs she argued with them that she and her husband were only lodgers, and the mob let them be, without further upset.⁴²

In spite of the mob leaving the Taverners unmolested, one has to consider the validity of the attack on the alehouse within the standard of moral legitimation which has been offered. It is difficult to work out how the destruction at Beckett's readily conforms to the script discernible elsewhere. The landlord was not a baker or grain merchant, nor can the assault be easily rationalised by appeal to the moral economy. Renton's account of the Norwich riots suggests that the targets of the rioters "were not a random sample, but were picked for their illegal and unethical marketing practices."⁴³ There is however no evidence that either Beckett or all of the bakers visited by the mob had been guilty of selling under weight, or of adulterating their bread. Such a generalisation risks taking an overly neat view of the uniformity of the composition, motives and discipline of the crowd. Saturday evening's events serve as a

⁴⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.7-11; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/9/7, Additional Evidences

⁴¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.8-10

⁴² Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/9/7, Additional Evidences

⁴³ Renton, 'The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort', p.126

reminder to exercise caution in idealising or over-simplifying the actions of the rioters. If the bread riots were informed by what was perceived as a legitimate grievance, it also provoked displays of force which were less focused, and more difficult to justify in terms of the same moral appeal.

However, equally, it is not sufficient to disregard this incident as an inauthentic example of the bread riot, as mere criminality provoked and supported by the spirit of licence, because it is inconsistent with the rather more orderly and disciplined script expressed elsewhere. If this particular section of the crowd seem to have been rather more concerned with filling their bellies or getting drunk, this should not to be disregarded, as it expresses another aspect of the riot. By over-rationalising their actions we distort and simplify the dynamics, and risk simply reifying the moral economy. The very real terror of these events is, no less than those which preceded it, provoked and supported by the same appeal to legitimisation.

The emphasis on the order and discipline intrinsic to the food riot has led some historians, following Thompson, to pay too little regard to the contrasting violence and disorder of events. By doing so, they risk stripping the riot of much of its force. The incidents which unfolded at the White Horse or over the course of the following day cannot simply be reduced to *charivari* or 'counter-theatre'. The threat of violence, more often against property, but on occasion against the person as well, was real, and would also have represented to the authorities, as well as to the bakers and millers, an expression of the inchoate force of the crowd. If the initial motivation and licence for events rested on a certain legalism, that was not necessarily sufficient to limit or to exhaust the proliferating energies manifest.

3. Perceptions of rising prices

There existed a belief, which insisted that prices were being artificially raised by individual greed, cartelisation and 'closed door' practices, and which expressed fears about the increasing privatisation of the provisioning business, by its removal from the public marketplace to the farm gates and drinking houses. Distrust of farmers and middlemen was commonplace. Dearth was frequently less likely to be attributed to the failure of harvests than it was to speculation and profiteering.

Such suspicions were not limited to the 'meaner sort' of working men and women alone, but found widespread popular expression. When London magistrates imposed a decrease in grain prices provisions were simply moved elsewhere where they could attain a higher price, and the resultant shortages led to a submission to the Privy Council which stated

there was just ground to suspect a combination had been entered into to raise the price of Flour and Wheat, and that with this view many Mealmen have ordered their Factors not to sell the Flour consigned to them... in order to make a scarcity in the *London* Market which may raise the price.⁴⁴

Nor were such explanations a recent phenomenon. Similar suspicions had been enunciated by officials throughout the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries and provided the justification for periodic directives empowering justices of the peace to control and regulate the middlemen's business.⁴⁵ It was, throughout this period, a consistent component of the rhetoric of governance to

⁴⁴ Charles Smith, 'A Short Essay on the Corn Trade and the Corn Laws', in Three Tracts on the Corn-Trade and Corn-Laws (London, 1766), p.29

⁴⁵ Walter and Wrightson, 'Dearth and the social order', pp.31-2

intervene in the lines of supply in order to safeguard the necessities of life, and subsequently maintain good civic order.

However the practice of marketing provisions found itself increasingly at variance with an idealised model, in which the farmer brought their produce directly to the open pitch market, and sold it in person to the consumer. It is doubtful that such a simplistic image ever adequately described the actual state of affairs, but by the mid-eighteenth-century "it applied only in the realms of imagination".⁴⁶ The type of direct marketing by farmers found in Norwich's 'ped market' was not widespread practice, and Marshall, writing in the early 1780s, believed it virtually unique to the city.⁴⁷ Defoe, writing in the 1720s, described the extension of the role of middlemen in the corn trade as a recent innovation, reflecting the development of an increasingly integrated national market, as well as supplying the overseas export markets. In particular he noted the proliferation of corn factors, who "buy the Corn, even in the Barn before it is thresh'd".⁴⁸

With the expansion of the national market these middlemen spread outside of London to the regional corn markets, and the countryside. With the extension of the system of paved turnpike roads grain, as well as news and letters, could be transported more easily. The more effective transmission of information helped to generate a greater awareness of comparative prices, and enabled the sustenance of a national market. However a fundamental tension existed between the demands of local and national markets for corn, and when disturbances did occur it was often the movement of grain for export that proved the decisive factor in triggering events.

⁴⁶ Richard Perren, 'Markets and Marketing', in G.E. Mingay (ed.), Agrarian History of England and Wales Vol. VI (Cambridge, 1989), p.213

⁴⁷ William Marshall, The Rural Economy of Norfolk (London, 1787), p. 195

⁴⁸ [Daniel Defoe], The Compleat English Tradesman vol.II (London, 1727), pt.II, p.36

During the course of the eighteenth-century Norwich became the principal marketing centre for corn produced in the region, supplanting the more dispersed local markets, and by the end of the century Arthur Young found the only grain markets of note in the county to be Norwich, Lynn and Yarmouth.⁴⁹ This move was facilitated by the growth in trade by samples, which bypassed the need for farmers to move the bulk of their produce directly to the market in order to sell it.⁵⁰ Trade was expected to be done in the designated area of the marketplace, but given that no goods were actually exchanged, many transactions took place in the more convivial surroundings of the inns and alehouses which fringed the market. By removing trade from the marketplace they also avoided paying the official charges levied, and “being chiefly done at the Inns, it makes no show.”⁵¹ Such arrangements were established practices, and not in general considered illicit, as is demonstrated by the periodic advertisements placed in the local press by merchants to attract trade. John Clover placed a notice to inform farmers that he would be at the White Swan Inn in the marketplace every Saturday afternoon during the corn season, “where a fair and full marketable price will be given for all sorts of Grain”.⁵²

However the growth of sample markets was also commonly perceived as restricting the quantities of grain which reached the open market, inflating prices, and thereby making it more difficult for household consumers to procure what they needed. Although Defoe believed little could be done to prevent dealing in samples, he lamented the trend as he thought it constituted a clandestine practice which “opens the door to the fatal and forbidden Trade of

⁴⁹ Alan Everitt, ‘The Marketing of Agricultural Produce’, in John R. Chartres (ed.) Agricultural Markets and Trade (Cambridge, 1990), p. 138; Arthur Young, General View of the Agriculture of Norfolk (London, 1804), pp. 490-1

⁵⁰ B.A. Holderness, ‘Prices, Productivity and Output’, in Mingay, Agrarian History vol. VI, p.87

⁵¹ Marshall, Rural Economy of Norfolk, pp. 195-198

⁵² NM 4th Jan. 1766

engrossing, regrating, forestalling the Markets”, and could in consequence promulgate dearth in time of shortages.⁵³

The comparatively clandestine nature of these transactions, removed from the public market, rendered them suspect, liable to be perceived as dishonest, or even unlawful. A common belief persisted that buying by sample was a form of forestalling, as it caused such goods to be withheld from market.⁵⁴ Similar suspicions attended the activities of corn-factors and their agents who bought from the farmer before the crop had been harvested, even if licensed to do so. This increasing privatisation of marketing by falling outside of public visibility and transparency seemed to incriminate itself.

There was evident confusion as to how far the trade in samples comprised the illegal practice of forestalling. The law still used to safeguard the market dated from the sixteenth-century, and was intended to guard against indirect practices which saw produce bought for resale before it reached the open market, and consequently pushing up prices. Penalties for the offences had traditionally been set as forfeiture of goods and a fine, with imprisonment and punishment in the pillory for subsequent breaches.⁵⁵

In 1720, during the downturn in the city’s manufactures, the Mayor’s Court imposed restrictions on the market in an attempt to ensure that supplies were freely available to domestic consumers at a reasonable price, and tried to ensure all transactions were made in the market.⁵⁶ In order to prevent engrossing, regrating and forestalling, which were consistently identified as the cause of prices being pushed up, the court passed an order limiting the hours that

⁵³ [Defoe], Compleat English Tradesman vol.II, pt.II, p.46

⁵⁴ Smith, ‘A Short Essay on the Corn Trade and the Corn Laws’, p.38

⁵⁵ 5&6 Edw.VI c.14; William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England vol.IV (Chicago & London, 1979), pp.158-9

⁵⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/28, Mayor’s Court Book, 25th Jun. 1720, f.27

provisions could be sold. On market days no butter, cheese or eatables could be sold for anything other than domestic consumption before the market bell sounded 2 p.m.⁵⁷ When it was felt to be necessary these orders were periodically reiterated, and advertisements placed in the news to the same effect, which seems to indicate that the measures were not a permanent fixture of city life, but operated in reaction to a perceived need.⁵⁸

Similarly, when the price of provisions rose again in 1733, the measures introduced by the Mayor's Court publicly blamed inflation on the prevalence of forestalling artificially inflated prices.⁵⁹ The tendency to attribute rising prices to the middlemen became a recognisable component of the authorities' approach to the problem in the eighteenth-century. Just a few weeks before the riot in the market, on the 23rd August, the front page of the *Norwich Mercury* ran a story reporting that the practice of dealing in samples was being suppressed by the gentlemen of Surrey, as it was "contrary to the Law... [and] it is a severe Injury done to the Poor, and feeds the cruel Avarice of forestallers and Engrossers of Corn."⁶⁰

The assize of grain had been enforced weekly under John Patteson's mayoralty, far more so than under his predecessor James Poole. This was the effect of both an increased general awareness of rising prices amidst continuing exports, and in response to governmental initiatives earlier in the year.⁶¹ In periods of dearth, or where rising prices meant that there was a question mark over supply the Mayor's Court assumed reactive measures in order to regulate the marketing of provisions and minimise disruptions to civic order. The assize of bread, enabling the Justices of the Peace to set the price of

⁵⁷ Ibid., 12th Jul. 1720, f.27

⁵⁸ NM, 2nd Apr. 1726; NM, 14th Sep. 1728

⁵⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 16a/29, Mayor's Court Book, 22nd – 25th Aug. 1733, f.180

⁶⁰ NM, 23rd Aug. 1766

⁶¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/10/9, House of Commons order to inform them of the Price of Corn, 29th Jan. 1766

bread in relation to the price of either wheat or flour, had fallen into disuse by the end of the seventeenth-century, but in 1710 a bill was raised in parliament to reinstitute it.⁶² Petitions were raised by the bakers' company of Norwich, amongst other cities, opposing the bill as oppressive, but their protests failed to curtail its adoption.

Observation of the assize was in general only intermittent, and resulted in few prosecutions. This system of assize was however ill-suited, in light of economic changes such as the emergence of millers who, rather than simply milling on commission to the baker, functioned as independent factors, producing flour of different grades of fineness and sold at different prices. The higher quality flour produced a fine white bread, whereas coarser, darker bread produced by the lowest grade was of inferior quality and nutritional value than the traditional standard wheaten loaf. The change resulted in a shift in public taste, with the consumption of the dearer white loaf becoming increasingly common, particularly in London and the wheat producing regions.⁶³ Accounts for Norwich indicate that in 1745 a fine flour imported from Hertfordshire was freely on sale in the city, whereas previously only "a coarse household bread" had been available.⁶⁴

It has been observed by Dale Williams that the areas worst affected by the disturbances in 1766 were those most dependent on the consumption of wheaten bread, as they were less adaptable to shortages in supplies of wheat.⁶⁵ The declining demand for non-wheaten bread meant that the corn producing regions became increasingly dependent on wheat production at the expense of rye and barley, and this affected their robustness to adapt to poor

⁶² Sidney and Beatrice Webb, 'The Assize of Bread', The Economic Journal XIV (1904), pp.198-200

⁶³ Ibid., p. 210

⁶⁴ Norfolk and Norwich Vade Mecum and Remembrancer (Norwich, 1822), p.12

⁶⁵ Dale E. Williams, 'Morals, Markets and the English Crowd in 1766', Past & Present 104 (1984), p.59

harvests. Demand for wheat made the market more reliant on inter-regional trade to secure stable supplies, but, as in 1766, increased overseas demand and the bounty on corn combined to reduce the stocks and increase the price.⁶⁶

Changes to the way in which trade was conducted made it increasingly difficult for the city magistrates to regulate the market, as had been done in the past. Furthermore any traditionalist model of paternalist interventionism found itself increasingly at variance with the commercialisation of the economy and the weakening of localism in the face of the advance of national markets. Allied to shifts in attitudes about governance, many of the powers invested in the magistracy found themselves subject to only partial observance. John Bohstedt has argued persuasively of the need to exercise some caution in appealing unconditionally to the notion of paternalism, as it may have existed not as a cultural constant, but activated in response to the likelihood of social unrest.⁶⁷ Although the intermittent application of the assize and periodic renewal of regulations of marketing support the idea that paternalist governance was fluctuating, it can be seen that these measures were established strategies for Norwich's governors long before the putative watershed of 1740 proposed by Bohstedt for the invention of a moral-economic tradition of riot.

In previous years dearth had been met in the city by a corporative response to rising food prices. A decade earlier in 1756, following poor harvests and a jump in prices, a public subscription was raised to subsidise the price of bread for twelve thousand of the city's poor.⁶⁸ Similarly the winter which followed the riots was marked by continuing shortages, and the magistracy, parish officers and great

⁶⁶ Holderness, 'Prices, Productivity and Output', pp.97-8

⁶⁷ John Bohstedt, 'The Pragmatic Economy, the Politics of Provisions and the 'Invention' of the Food Riot Tradition in 1740', in Randall and Charlesworth (ed.) Moral Economy and Popular Protest (Basingstoke, 2000), pp.55-92

⁶⁸ Norfolk and Norwich Vade Mecum, p.15

and good of the city were active in promoting collections and making personal donations to those most at risk. This kind of communal and paternalistic response to fluctuations in the market was not informed solely by a sense of *noblesse oblige*, but also by the necessity to maintain good order.

In the months running up the riots there was a constant flurry of notices and correspondence in the press, reflecting a general concern and heightened awareness of the dangers attendant on the increasing prices of provisions. When one correspondent to the *Norwich Mercury* sent in a recipe for a wholesome gruel of rice and molasses that could be introduced into people's diets in place of bread, noting it "the best Preventative against Fluxes and Agues, which Disorders generally follow a Scarcity of Bread", they might have as easily been talking about the riots which unsettled the body politic.⁶⁹

4. Putting down the mob

On the Sunday morning the captains of the protests made their way across the city, blowing horns to raise the crowd again.⁷⁰ As people began to gather they were led through the marketplace and then out of the city, heading south towards the watermill at Trowse, where much of the flour for the surrounding county, beyond the city's limits, was milled. On the crowd's arrival at the mill they began threatening to demolish it, as they had at the city's mills the previous day, but several people who lived there came out to intervene. Reasoning with the mob that they thought the owner "a good man to the poor," food and drink was brought out to the

⁶⁹ *NM*, 12 Jul. 1766

⁷⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.45; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/4, Rex vs. Thomas Lighting

crowd in an effort to pacify them. They ate what was offered before leading off, making their way over the bridge towards Trowse Newton Hall.⁷¹ Affairs at this stage of the day were fairly ordered, with much of the momentum of the previous day's rioting having dissipated, and the crowd was seemingly more open to negotiation.

The tenant of the Hall, William Money, was a prosperous wine merchant in the city and tenant of the estates at Trowse Newton, but also had a number of properties and land holdings elsewhere in south Norfolk. Money was a man of some means, and clearly aspired to a certain station in life. He had a portrait of himself painted by Thomas Bardwell, a fashionable painter much in-demand among local manufacturers, who had also been commissioned by the magistracy to carry out a series of full length official portraits of the city's mayors in their finery, to hang in the court chamber of the Guildhall. When a friend of Money's tried to dissuade the hundred strong crowd making their way toward the Hall his attempts fell on deaf ears. As he walked with them, all the while making his entreaties, someone jostled him and asked "Damn you, what business have you here? Did not the old rogue whip the gleaners off his land?"⁷²

Money, whose main trade was as a wine merchant, was a less obvious target for a bread riot. However his diverse business interests included several farms he held in the south of the county. There is little indication of whether his crops had been exported, but the reference to his treatment of the gleaners, whose customary practice of taking whatever grain was left in the fields after they had been harvested, was felt strong enough grounds to legitimate their attention. In addition Money was a common councillor for the greater Mancroft ward and one of its Guardians for the poor, which

⁷¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, f.12; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/10/7, Draft Depositions

⁷² Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, f.1

may have helped make him a target for the crowd's ire.⁷³ Two of the bakers targeted by the rioting, Robert Elvin and George Sharpen, were also members of the Common Council, and Sharpen was also a Guardian of the poor.⁷⁴

One of their number, leading the crowd into the yard of the house responded to offers of beer by calling aloud "The Hall they came for, and the hall they would have for all the beer". At these words the crowd pressed forward, demolishing the ground-floor windows while others forced their way into the house. They went through the rooms, destroying all the furniture and moveable goods, and throwing it from the windows, even tearing up the wainscot from the parlours.⁷⁵ One rioter, meeting Money's daughter on the stairs, threatened her "Damn your soul, deliver your money or I'll beat your brains out".⁷⁶ The mob stripped the house of almost every item of furniture, as well as destroying or stealing the silver plate, clothing, books and parchments, and family portraits. The broken pieces of furniture were piled up in the kitchen, and calling out "life for life - Fire fire fire", they attempted to set it alight, calling for the hall to be burnt to the ground.⁷⁷

In the deposition of one of the witnesses to events the marginal notes record that he thought many had called out "We don't come from to be bribed We come for the Hall the Hall and will have Law".⁷⁸ Later in the day the crowd was also reported to have been "shouting the law" as they attacked a bakery.⁷⁹ The phrases are revealing, and if their meaning is not immediately obvious they seem to be consistent with the crowd's own perception of their

⁷³ Norf. RO, NCR 16c/9a, Assembly Waste Book, 3rd May 1765

⁷⁴ Hawes, Index, pp.57, 107, 136

⁷⁵ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.1-2, 4, 7, 8-10, 12; Norf. RO, 6h/2/7/5, Depositions of Witnesses; Norf. RO, 6h/2/9/5, Depositions of Witnesses

⁷⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, f.2

⁷⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/10/1, Deposition of Charles Claxton

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.20

behaviour as carried out in defence of the law and the public benefit. This interpretation is unlikely to have been given great credence by the authorities, as is perhaps indicated by the word being crossed out in the deposition. Implicit in any such appeal to legitimization of the mob would be a criticism of gubernatorial negligence, which by extension might have provided a medium for the expression of social resentment at the aldermanic order.

As revealed in the episode with the Taverners the previous evening at the alehouse there was a self-consciousness about social distinctions in the crowd's actions.⁸⁰ There was an apparent sympathy with the lodgers and servants, an identification with the poor working people. It was the intervention of the modest neighbours and servants at Trowse Milgate who persuaded the rioters not to demolish the mill. Similarly in the events at Trowse Newton Hall which followed the rioters stripped the house of virtually all its fixtures and fittings, yet left the beds in the servants' quarters intact.⁸¹

From what we know of the crowd from the witness depositions and reportage, its composition was predominantly of the dependent labouring poor: labourers, sawyers, bricklayers, journeymen weavers, servants and apprentices. This impression is consistent with the Quarter Session records of those charged in connection with the riots, and the parochial reports by churchwardens and overseers of those who fled after the events.⁸² This is generally in keeping with what we know of bread riots in general, with those most affected by rising prices or the inertia of magistrates being those who could least afford the necessities of life. Females seem not to have been especially active in proceedings. Two women were

⁸⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/9/7, Additional Evidences

⁸¹ NM, 4th Oct. 1766

⁸² Norf. RO, NCR case 6h/4/5, List of Prisoners; Norf. RO, NCR case 6h/4/7, List of Prisoners; Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/22, Norwich Quarter Sessions, 29th Oct. 1752 – 29th Jan. 1753, ff.112-8; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/5/1-25, Parish orders

arrested for inciting the rioters, and were subsequently charged at the city's Quarter Sessions, and another was identified as being amongst the mob, but was not charged.⁸³ The relative under-representation of women in the testimonies of the riots might however be indicative of an unwillingness to give evidence which could lead to their prosecution, particularly where uncertainty existed as to how they would be prosecuted by the authorities, and whether they might be convicted capitally.

Young apprentices and servant boys were visible at the incidents, and at the ransacking of one bakery were directed by an older man, who provided them with instructions.⁸⁴ It was these young men and boys who comprised the greater number of those identified by the parish churchwardens and overseers of the poor as having gone astray after the riots, for fear of being prosecuted. In the cases of both the young men as well as most of those older journeymen identified, their age and social status meant they were more likely to be bachelors, and had no family dependents. This fact made their ties easier to cut and permitted their flight. Only a small number of men were listed as having abandoned their families to avoid capture.⁸⁵

As the crowd dispersed from the Hall rioters gathered at a nearby granary, knocking the tiles from its roof, whilst others boarded a keel on the river, cutting its moorings and throwing all of the barley and pease on board into the river.⁸⁶ Another group converged on the malthouse just beyond the city's gates, leased by John Clover, which they untiled and set alight.⁸⁷ With the malthouse and its

⁸³ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.42; Norf. RO, NCR Case 20a/22, Norwich Quarter Sessions, 28th Jan. 1767, ff.115-6

⁸⁴ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.5

⁸⁵ NCR Case 6h/5/1-25, Parish orders

⁸⁶ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.8-11

⁸⁷ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, ff.25-7, 29, 31-33; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/10/10,

contents burning the rioters made their way back through the gates and towards a bakery which lay nearby, and owned by Robert Elvin, one of the common councillors of the city. Hearing that the mob were moving, crowds of onlookers came to watch their progress.⁸⁸

While these events had been taking place the magistrates had sent the town cryer around the city to gather men to the guildhall where they were deputed and armed with staffs.⁸⁹ By the time the *posse committatus* arrived to confront the rioters at another bakery near the Cathedral they found the house badly damaged, and a considerable quantity of wheat thrown from its windows into the street.⁹⁰ They wasted little time engaging the rioters, who attempted to escape. A number of rioters trapped inside the house were caught unaware, and were badly beaten while trying to get away. One rioter engaged the posse, armed with an axe, striking one of them and knocking down several others before escaping. The man was next seen early on Monday morning on his way out of the city gates, escaping punishment by permanently fleeing the city.⁹¹

In total about thirty rioters were apprehended and detained in the Castle. The citizen volunteers formed patrols who were ordered to remain on guard overnight in case trouble should flare up, and detain any suspicious characters.⁹² On one such patrol James Bunn Jr., whose father's bakery had been targeted the previous night, observed one of the rioters attempting to avoid detection in Conisford Street. Unfortunately his distinctive fine green breeches – “much better than seemed suitable to the rest of his dress” – and

Deposition of William Fisher; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/10/10, Deposition of Henry Butcher

⁸⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.28; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/5, Rex vs. Robert Boardman

⁸⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.27

⁹⁰ Ibid., ff.14-8, 20-1, 23-4, 50; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/7/6, Deposition of Edward Jenkins; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/7/2, Deposition of Richard Stirman; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/1, Rex vs. Edward Potter; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/8/5, Rex vs. Robert Boardman

⁹¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/5/23, Parish Orders SS Simon and Jude

⁹² Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/4, Depositions of Witnesses, f.3

the dusting of feathers on his head marked him out for their attention.⁹³ He was placed under arrest, and William Money's son, Philip, was subsequently able to positively identify the incongruous trousers as his own, plundered earlier in the day from his father's home.⁹⁴

Troops had been dispatched to the city on Sunday, as soon as word had been received of the disorders' outbreak, having been ordered by the War Office to mobilise immediately rather than await a request from the city's magistrates.⁹⁵ The 2nd Dragoon Guards arrived in the city from Colchester on the Wednesday to maintain the peace, relieving the officers of the city and the volunteer citizenry from their watch. The process of securing the order and peace of the city was not simply a matter of force, and although the army's presence stayed any further eruptions of violence, prices were still high and relations strained between the civic authorities and a section of its population.

5. The national situation and the causes of disorder

As has already been touched on, the riots at Norwich did not occur in isolation, but were part of a national pattern of rioting occurring over a month-long period, of which Norwich was but one isolated incident. Rioting did not occur everywhere, but tended to be concentrated in particular regions. Dale Williams posed an important question by asking, given the kind of legitimation that appeals to

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., f.4

⁹⁵ Tony Hayter, The Army and the Crowd in mid-Georgian England (London, 1978), p.117

the 'moral economy' offered, why Norwich rioted, while other areas which experienced food shortages at the time did not?⁹⁶

All of the areas affected tended to be characterised by specialised proto-industrial economies, based primarily around the production of cloth and textiles. The distinctive characteristics common to these localities and their economies meant that they lacked the cohesion which was considered to characterise rural societies, "for the most part beyond the ken of squire or parson".⁹⁷ These locales, in their early integration into a national economy, were all largely dependent on effective communications and trade links, geared to the large-scale export of woollen stuffs and textiles, but significantly were also dependent on the importation of foodstuffs and other provisions.

In principle regional inter-marketing facilitated by the nationalisation of the market would provide greater security in the event of dearth. The eastern counties, traditionally the site for the production of the main national surplus, had suffered devastating failures to their harvests, while the north of the country and Scotland produced bumper crops that season. However parliament had been prorogued by the King until November so no change to the legislation could be effected in the meantime, and in the face of executive unresponsiveness the surplus corn continued to be exported overseas, rather than sold on the national market. The poor weather had affected most of Europe, so widespread harvest failures increased overseas demand and pushed up the revenues from the export market. However, there existed no straightforward consensus on what course of action should be taken to rectify the situation, and contemporary publications help expose some of the divisions which existed.

⁹⁶ Dale Edward Williams, 'Were "Hunger" Rioters Really Hungry?', Past & Present 71 (May 1976), pp.74-5

⁹⁷ Williams, 'Morals, Markets and the English Crowd', p.59

The pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine* were filled with letters from correspondents offering their differing interpretations of the causes and remedies to the inflation of food prices beyond the purse of many working people. These economic arguments all seem to have seen the dearth as more than the product of failing harvests alone. There was a widespread perception that natural shortages were compounded as the result of the country's economic and distributive arrangements. Most argued from an interventionist position, calling in the short term for an immediate stop to overseas exports, and curtailing their bounty. Concerns were voiced regarding the inflation of food prices, so that

When the profits of honest industry are inadequate to the maintenance of a family, this cuts the sinews of industry, renders mankind careless and unconcerned, as knowing that all they can do is insufficient to relieve the necessities.⁹⁸

In such circumstances the author advised direct intervention to regulate the affordability of staples, imposing a ceiling to prices. These arguments concerned not just the economic management of the immediate dearth, but saw them as part of a much larger set of issues which related to the good order of society itself. The inflation of prices was not just the vector for disorder, but symptomatic of the more general erosion of the reciprocal bonds which maintained social stability and good order. Underlying a number of these arguments was an apparent scepticism, if not outright opposition, regarding the economic changes which were transforming agriculture, and the concomitant shifts to demography and the social structure. Although conceding that agricultural improvements tended to secure greater productive yields, its critics argued that,

⁹⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine* XXXVI (London, 1766), p.398

rather than rendering provisions less expensive, the effect was forcing up prices to supply the expanding urban centres.

Accordingly London and the larger manufacturing centres like Norwich, which were dependent on importing their necessities, would engross an ever greater proportion of the market, and inflate prices. In Smollett's memorable turn-of-phrase, London was "an overgrown monster; which, like a dropsical head, will in time leave the body and extremities without nourishment and support."⁹⁹

Building on the same logic, several correspondents maintained that the fault lay not with the farmers themselves, but saw the inflation of prices as relating directly to this process of urbanisation, and the higher wages afforded to workers in manufacturing towns. Others argued that the inflation of prices would not be an issue, but for the wastefulness and sloth of the labouring classes: "If the poor would consider the abuse they make of plenty, they need not wonder that God should punish them with scarcity."¹⁰⁰

One of the most common calls of the day were for the establishment of magazines which would stockpile grain in case of shortages and counteract the risk of dearth.¹⁰¹ In effect this actually constituted a form of engrossing. One correspondent was willing to take this argument to its logical conclusion by claiming "Those who hoard when it is cheap, and bring it forth when it is dear, are most certainly the best friends of the community".¹⁰² However, in spite of such Mandevillian rationalisations, the mercantilism of writers like Nathaniel Forster retained a strongly corporative focus. Whilst recognising the importance of profits for trade to flourish, he

⁹⁹ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (New York, 1960), p.95

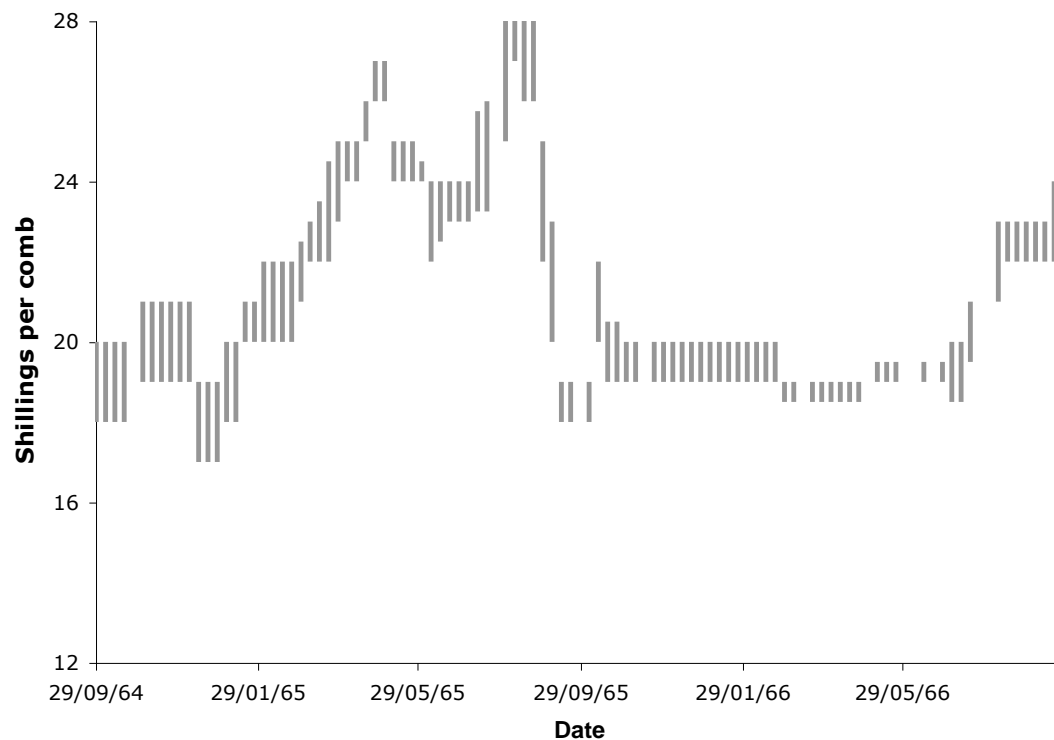
¹⁰⁰ *Gentleman's Magazine* XXXVI (London, 1766), pp.488

¹⁰¹ Nathaniel Forster, *An Enquiry into the Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions* (London, 1767), p.91

¹⁰² *Gentleman's Magazine* XXXVI (London, 1766), p.474

countered that “public spirit is always expected, and ought always to be found in acts of legislation and government”.¹⁰³

Fig.1 Norwich max. and min. prices per comb of wheat, Sep. 1764-66¹⁰⁴



The occurrence of the rioting in Norwich matches a pattern observed by Rudé; namely that in general incidents took place not when prices were at their peak, “as an automatic ‘trigger’ to disturbance”, but as they rose sharply from a lower price.¹⁰⁵ The range of prices charged for wheat, printed almost every week in the months leading up to events, show that they had peaked more than twelve months earlier, reaching a maximum price of 28s per comb in August 1765, but with that year’s harvest normalising to a level of approximately 20s per comb (Fig.1). However the weather

¹⁰³ Forster, *Causes of the Present High Price of Provisions*, p.19

¹⁰⁴ NM, 29th Sep. 1764 to 27th Sep. 1766

¹⁰⁵ Rudé, *The Crowd in History*, pp.218-9

conditions in 1766 meant that crops were failing and when prices began to rise again in July there was little prospect of rising prices being abated by the harvest. When rioting broke out in Norwich prices were on the upswing, but were still below the levels reported a little over a year earlier.

Although Rudé distinguished between the economic and political motives behind the incidence of riot, he pointed out that such motivations were frequently intertwined, acting as intensifiers for the other reaction.¹⁰⁶ The price of grain materially affected the lives of many of the poorer working people, but as can be seen, this was not sufficient to cause the people to riot in immediate response, as mere “rebellions of the belly”.¹⁰⁷ Rather, Thompson’s description of the moral economy recognised that, like the actions of their governors, the crowd needed to be able to represent its actions as carried out in the public interest, and as consistent with a legalism defined by normative expectations of governance, although any such authority was unlikely to be acknowledged by the authorities.

When the complacency of the government compounded the dearth of 1766, with the legislative measures agreed earlier in the year against the exportation of grain lapsing, it consequently placed pressure on local authorities to take control by regulating provisions. The means legally available to local authorities to do this were in practice limited. Beyond the regular assize of bread or using their influence locally to try to divert more goods to the open market for consumers, they were unable to do much to mitigate the situation. However the decision by the government, in the absence of parliament, to restate the appeal to the continuity of Tudor legislation against regrating, ingrossing and forestalling, provided the authority, and in the eyes of many, the legal justification, to break rank.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.219

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy’, p.186

Its public proclamation only served to reinforce the sense that rising prices were the result of dishonest and self-interested trade practices, in violation of the law.¹⁰⁸ In the week immediately preceding the rioting the front page of the front page of the *Norwich Mercury* was dominated by the text of the proclamation.

And whereas the prices of Corn are already very much increased, and the same is likely to grow much dearer, to the great Oppression of the Poor, partly because the said Acts are not duly put in Execution... We do hereby... command all and every Our Judges, Justices of the Peace... and all other Magistrates, Officers and Ministers... do cause the said Acts... put in speedy and effectual execution... We do hereby require and charge all or Officers, Ministers and Loving Subjects whatsoever, to be aiding and assisting in the due Execution of this our Royal Proclamation...¹⁰⁹

When rioting broke out the following Saturday, during the busiest market day of the week, it was not a spontaneous occurrence, but a deliberate response to the proclamation, claiming the authority it seemed to offer. On Saturday morning, before events at the marketplace began, one of the captains of the crowd forewarned there would be a riot that day.¹¹⁰ The crowd's calls, on the following day of rioting, for "the Law" were in all probability specifically addressed to the old law against regrating, forestalling and engrossing, restated by the proclamation.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Walter James Shelton, *English Hunger & Industrial Disorders* (London and Basingstoke, 1973), pp.47-9

¹⁰⁹ *NM* 20th Sep. 1766

¹¹⁰ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.26

¹¹¹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/10/1, Deposition of Charles Claxton; Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/2/1, Depositions of Witnesses, f.20

The mob's ability to exploit this language of legalism was in part a consequence of the social capital invested in the city's civic culture, and strengthened the defence of localised customary institutions, providing them with access to speak and act on behalf of the public interest.¹¹² This has been hinted at before, by observing that the specific forms of labour organisation which were more likely to take industrial action, such as the weavers and woolcombers, had the experience and inclination to inform other forms of collective action, as for example on food prices. In eighteenth-century Devon rioting was most likely to occur in boroughs with large electorates, possessing a culture which supported "intermittent popular political autonomy".¹¹³ Such forms of political inclusion privileged forms of bargaining which were based on a culture supporting vertical ties between the crowd and the magistracy.¹¹⁴ The absence of this type of culture elsewhere meant that this kind of reciprocal bargaining was less likely, and goes some way to explaining why some areas were more likely to protest than others.

6. Civic governance and its critics

The Mayor's Court remained in session over the days following the riots, with one or other of the aldermen above the chair presiding in their capacity as Justices of the Peace. Efforts were made to apprehend the rioters and secure depositions which would help identify the guilty parties and provide the evidence for their legal prosecution. The mayor and magistrates, faced with the rioting, had to effectively judge how to balance the preservation of civic order and private property on the one hand, and being seen to act in a

¹¹² See ch.2

¹¹³ John Bohstedt and Dale E. Williams, 'The Diffusion of Riots', The Journal of Interdisciplinary History 19:1 (Summer 1988), p.22

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p.24

proportionate and just way on the other. During the course of the 1740 bread riots in the city the magistrates called in the soldiers quartered there, who fired on the crowd "in order to quell them, by which means several unconcerned persons were accidentally killed".¹¹⁵ It is perhaps telling that none of the rioters was executed for their part in those disturbances.

A statement issued by the Court of Mayoralty and advertised in the news, sought to explain their actions, explaining they had "used every lenient Method for restoring Peace and Quiet... until the Rioters became so outrageous". They were at pains to emphasise that they had the greatest sympathies for the distress caused to the poorest by high prices, and that in the weeks before the riot had applied to Parliament to reimpose the embargo on exports. Their particular thanks were extended to the "worthy Gentlemen" of the citizenry who had assisted in restoring peace to the city.¹¹⁶ The image they affected of civic unanimity was somewhat at odds with the reality. A sergeant in the militia, instructed to assist the magistrates suppress the riot had refused to do so, and was subsequently demoted.¹¹⁷ Similarly there were still serious concerns about unsettled social relations, with the Mayor warning, in a letter to the Secretary of State, that "a very dangerous disposition still prevails amongst the lower Classes of the People here".¹¹⁸ One Daniel Taylor had been committed to the gaol until the Quarter Sessions, charged with abusing and assaulting a man who had volunteered as a staffman.¹¹⁹

It was vitally important for the ruling orders of the city that they present a united front, to restore confidence that the peace of the

¹¹⁵ Blomefield, Norwich (Norwich, 1745), p.317

¹¹⁶ NM, 25th Oct. 1766

¹¹⁷ NM, 15th Nov. 1766

¹¹⁸ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/10/8, Letter from Mayor John Patteson, 15th Oct. 1766

¹¹⁹ Norf. RO, NCR Case 6h/4/7, List of Prisoners; Norf. RO, NCR 20a/22, Quarter Sessions, 28th Jan. 1767, f.115

city had been restored. In a letter to Marquess Townshend, his attendance at the County Sessions the following week was pleaded for, in order to “give weight to whatever shall be done”, lending proceedings the authority his presence commanded.¹²⁰ The magistracy was keen that it should not be seen as remiss in execution of their duties, and with renewed vigour made public notice of the fact that they were enforcing the weights and measures of all marketable goods by advertising the fact prominently in the *Mercury*, and backdated to the 27th September, when the rioting had begun.¹²¹ At several junctures they were emphatic in stating that they had already intervened to reduce the burden on the poor of the city, and had petitioned for an embargo prior to events taking the turn they had. Further regulation of the corn market was made the following May, which moved the site of the market, and presumably was intended to underline it as the proper place for transactions to be made, and for their better regulation.

In this way their pleas for the men found guilty of riot at the special commission in the city demonstrated both their good governance and the integrity of the law in according leniency. Douglas Hay showed how in the eighteenth-century the execution of the law functioned as a means of negotiating power. Justices employed the discretionary powers invested in their office to show responsiveness to popular ideas of justice, such as those underpinning Thompson’s notion of the moral economy.¹²² The magistracy of Norwich was unlikely to have possessed a personal relationship with the people who appeared before them in court, as was expected of the idealised figure of the paternalist Country Justice. However, as we

¹²⁰ Norf. RO, BL/T 8/2/15, Sir Edmund Bacon to 1st Marquess Townshend, 2nd Oct. 1766

¹²¹ NM, 4th Oct. 1766

¹²² Douglas Hay, 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law', in Hay et al, *Albion's Fatal Tree* (London, 1977), p.51

have examined, the civic culture of the city inculcated a strong sense of expectation of just governance, and discretion offered the ability to seek accommodation within the law.

The way that the law was interpreted and executed was not uncontested, but provided a field for dispute and negotiation, in which the Justices' discretionary powers were instrumental in managing social relations.¹²³ The indiscriminate application of capital punishment "especially if the offender concerned was young, old, female, or had committed the crime because his or her family were in great distress" risked discrediting the application of justice, and could be expected to be met with hostility.¹²⁴ To some extent this matter was out of the hands of the magistrates as, if found guilty of riot, sentence of death was mandatory. However, following the prosecution of the rioters the magistracy was careful to plead to the King for leniency, ensuring that they were seen to have been moderate and reasonable in the execution of justice. Of the seventeen men who were charged with riot, nine were found guilty and capitally convicted. However of those, one was sent on appeal to the Court of King's Bench, six were pardoned and transported, and just two of them, David Long and John Hall, were executed.¹²⁵

The need to represent themselves as public spirited and demonstrate sympathy for the poor was not limited to the civic authorities. The owners of the New Mills, once refurbished, made much of the reduced rates that they could offer to the needy, who had only small portions of grain for milling. John Clover took out an advertisement in the same paper to refute allegations which were circulating the city from "a licentious Set of Men" that he was engrossing wheat. "I leave it to the considerate Part of Mankind,

¹²³ Peter King, *Crime, Justice, and Discretion in England* (Oxford, 2000), pp.355-6

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.370

¹²⁵ Norf. RO, WLS LV/41, 428X5, Rex vs. John Royce; *NM*, 20th Dec. 1766; *NM*, 17th Jan. 1767

how far these malicious Invectives have contributed to the Mischief already done me, and may possibly be intended by a poor deluded mob, mov'd first by their own distresses, but I am afraid pointed in their Proceedings by the villainy of ill-designing People."¹²⁶ As the winter drew in collections were organised to secure provisions for the poorest of the city. Edward Bacon, one of the city's MPs, provided a large amount of his grain to be sold to the poor of the city below its market value, and arranged with the city's workhouse to ensure it was distributed to those most in need.¹²⁷ As in previous years regular contributions were made to the prisoners in the city gaol, to keep them in bread and meat over the winter months, and their gratitude to their benefactors published in the pages of the *Norwich Mercury*. Whilst there was evidently a commitment to corporative support in time of shortages, particularly for those most in need, this should not be confused with support for the rioting.

However, in spite of efforts to portray an image of communal unanimity, divisions were brought to the surface by a campaign of anonymous letters threatening further violence. These letters were perhaps also connected to the poisoning of the hounds of the Norwich hunt. The hounds, which were kept at the White Swan in the marketplace, were believed to have been targeted by someone who knew to poison only the "best of the Pack", and the subscribers to the hunt offered a reward of twenty guineas for a conviction.¹²⁸ The hunt was a select body, functioning as an institution for sociability and patronage amongst the city's "Gentlemen of considerable Fortune".¹²⁹ Considered in this context, the implications of their hounds being specifically targeted poses a number of questions, especially given the recent events.

¹²⁶ *NM*, 18th Oct. 1766

¹²⁷ *NM*, 3rd Jan. 1767; *NM*, 14th Feb. 1767

¹²⁸ *NM*, 18th Oct. 1766

¹²⁹ Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Verse relative to the Contested Election (Norwich, 1768), pp.14-19

The first letter, addressed to alderman James Poole, the former Mayor, warned "you Justes of the Pase that if Bakers and the Buchers and market peopel if they do not sall thar Commovits at a reasnabell rate as they do at other Markets... your vinegar hoses and your Taller Chandler and fine House will be sat on fire all on one Night".¹³⁰ Poole had accompanied the posse at Tombland on the Sunday, and as a Justice of the Peace was in session the day after the riots, and had tried the suspects brought to the town hall. The distribution of threatening letters frequently accompanied incidents of riot or related disturbances, and there had been periodic cases of threats when tensions were running high. E.P. Thompson conjectured that they were part of a mutually recognisable script which was used to apply pressure on the authorities to institute remedial measures, and so should not be interpreted too literally.¹³¹

Several days later a second letter was delivered late at night to John Patteson's club at the Rose Tavern. The letter was quite different, both in its tone and the level of literacy evident. Given the common awareness of the use of these kinds of letters there is no reason to assume that they necessarily originated in the same quarter, nor that they even served the same purpose.¹³²

...for God Sake if you have any regard for your own Safety do what is commanded or expect the dire Event, as for the poor Soldiers I pity them for by God we neither give nor receive Quarter but are determined to perish by the Sword as death will be a deliverance - The land is fertile and bring forth well cultivated fruits in due Season but knavery on one hand and policy on the other have made things thus artificially dear but woe to Mr Pool - the attach will

¹³⁰ NM, 25th Oct. 1766

¹³¹ E.P. Thompson, 'The Crime of Anonymity', in Hay et al, Albion's Fatal Tree, p.279

¹³² Ibid., pp.328-9

begin in four different parts and those that do not fall by the Sword shall by the flames - You will be out of Danger for you can look at this noble sentence of Horace without any check. *Hic murus aeneus esto nil conscire sibi nulla pallescere culpa.*¹³³

The last line was from Horace's first *Epistle to Maecenas*, and was part of a longer passage, beginning: "But boys at play cry, You shall be king, if you will do right... Tell me, pray, is the Roscian law [which states that wealth is to be pursued before virtue] best, or the boy's song which offers the kingdom to them that do right[?]"¹³⁴ The tone is obviously highly literate, distinguishing it from the letter to Poole. When the letters were published, in an effort to detect and prosecute the authors, this contrast would have been quite obvious to the public at large. Several weeks later, on the 15th November, an advertisement was taken out by James Bunn Jr. in the *Mercury* to deny an allegation of his being the author of the letter.¹³⁵

Whether Bunn was actually the letter's author or not is perhaps less important than the rumour itself. He had been active in suppressing the riot, so it seems a curious allegation. The rumours are perhaps more indicative of underlying tensions within the body politic. It raises the possibility of the letters being used as the means to destabilise the city's political grandees and question their ability or legitimacy to rule. By the 1760s it is generally considered that the partisan conflicts of preceding decades had been rendered largely irrelevant. However it was also a period of significant social change, which created an environment fertile for increased political

¹³³ NM, 25th Oct. 1766

¹³⁴ Horace, Works vol.IV (London, 1767), p.10

¹³⁵ NM, 15th Nov 1766

participation by the ever more significant middling classes of the city.

The political divisions which held sway over Norwich in the 1760s have been characterised, like other large freeman boroughs, as based around a corporation party and an 'Independent' interest, opposed to its oligarchical tendencies and pressing for greater recognition of the "political status of the middling traders and professionals".¹³⁶ The Independents' ambition for greater representation of their interests found expression in the anti-corruption, patriot rhetoric of the supporters of John Wilkes.¹³⁷ By 1763 the Independent cause in Norwich had begun to take shape around a nucleus of leaders in the city's Common Council, which had a far more varied composition than the Mayor's Court. The Council was drawn from the middling-class of tradesmen, smaller merchants, factors, shopkeepers and suppliers, in addition to the merchant manufacturers and other gentlemen, a number of whom would eventually become aldermen.¹³⁸

From that time relations between the Common Council and the Mayor's Court had become increasingly strained. The councillors' requests to inspect the charters of the corporation were turned down on several occasions by the aldermen, until they succeeded, partly it seems, by subterfuge and inside assistance, in getting hold of the books. The council's legal representation was then able to present a legal case which determined that the management of the charitable finances of the hospitals, and consequently its powers of patronage, should not be bestowed on the aldermen of the Mayor's

¹³⁶ John Brooke, The House of Commons 1754-1790 (Oxford, 1964), p.20; Nicholas Rogers, 'Aristocratic Clientage, Trade and Independency', Past & Present 61 (Nov. 1973), pp.80-4; Wilson, The sense of the people, p.409

¹³⁷ George Rudé, Wilkes and Liberty (Oxford, 1962), p.179

¹³⁸ Wilson, The sense of the people, p.408

Court alone, but by the Assembly, the corporation's powers being "in the whole Body and not in the Mayor and Aldermen alone".¹³⁹

Consequently criticism of the handling of the riots reflected more generally on the Mayor's Court, and served the Independents' cause by discrediting the corporation's governance. The initial accusation that Bunn was the author of the threatening letter made little sense if it was simply supporting the rioters. But if it was understood that the letter's purpose was to voice criticism of the corporation's governance it can be interpreted rather differently. The quote by Horace, in reference to Maecenas, would have also been recognisable to the more literate as alluding to the principle of patronage, a key theme in the Independents' allegations of oligarchical control. The poll books for 1768 indicate that James Bunn and his father were both amongst a significant number of men in the city who supported the Independent cause.¹⁴⁰

The 1768 election was contested by Thomas Beevor, a local brewer, who stood as an Independent candidate, hoping to displace Edward Bacon, who had supported the ministry on the question of General Warrants. A contemporary observer remarked that Bacon was "supported by many of the wealthiest and oldest Gentlemen in *Norwich*, and [Beevor] depends chiefly upon the middle Rank of People, the Tradesmen and young Folks."¹⁴¹ In response to Bacon's supporters, who emphasised that he had supplied corn at a low price to the poor the previous winter, his opponents responded by pointing out that such supplies had been scant. Further hearsay began to circulate around the city, insinuating that Bacon had been in partnership with John Clover, and had been instrumental in engrossing supplies of grain for export during the dearth of 1766.

¹³⁹ Norf. RO, NCR 16c/9a, Assembly Waste Book, 3rd May 1765; Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, The Manor and the Borough (London, 1908), pp.535-6

¹⁴⁰ Poll for Members of Parliament (Norwich, 1768)

¹⁴¹ Miscellaneous Pieces relative to the Contested Election, p.xi

Once again Clover was forced to place an advertisement in the notices of the local paper to deny the truth of such claims, defending his own conduct, and dispelling allegations of any commercial partnership.¹⁴²

In this context John Royce's invocation to "take no bribes" assumed a double meaning. In the run up to the contested election of 1768 one of the songs coined was named '*No Bribes*', echoing that slogan:

In Times of great Need,
To give the *poor* Bread,
Is an Action well worthy of Praise;
And who, with *good* Heart,
Will act such a Part,
The Esteem of the wise ought to raise...

But with lucrative View
Such Actions to do,
Of *Charity* little denotes,
And to give to the *poor*,
At this Time, is sure,
No Merit – but bribing for Votes.¹⁴³

The criticism of bribery had been a common cry in the city in the preceding years, and drew on the popular terminology of independency and the patriot constitution, which had moved into the mainstream in the 1750s, finding a champion in William Pitt the Elder. In the course of time opposition rhetoric on patriotism and corruption had become a recognised figure of political discourse,

¹⁴² NM, 5th Dec. 1767

¹⁴³ Miscellaneous Pieces relative to the Contested Election, pp.58-9

less obviously aligned to any one specific party.¹⁴⁴ Its critique of the oligarchical control of power and ministerial corruption provided a political language fitted for the ambitions of the growing middling-rank of society. The 'country' discourse which had helped to mobilise popular opposition to the dominance of Walpole's ministry in previous decades retained its force for those who "believed their views reflected the true interests of the nation at large, the country, against a small corrupt faction, the Court and its minions."¹⁴⁵

Although Bacon and Harbord were re-elected to the Houses of Parliament, a total of 1136 electors (41.5%) cast their votes in favour of Beevor. If we only consider voters in the city, excluding those resident in London or the country, this proportion increases to 44.6% of voters, and by examining St. Peter Mancroft alone Beevor was supported by more than half of all voters (54.1%). Of the total 2736 electors voting 835 (30.5%) voted for Beevor exclusively, refusing to cast their other vote for either of the two other candidates. If we consider the city and St. Peter Mancroft in isolation this figure is marginally higher at 33.5% and 33.7% of voters respectively.¹⁴⁶ It's notable that amongst the occupational groups whose voting was more likely to follow a strict 'no-junction' pattern, casting only one vote for Beevor alone to the exclusion of both standing members, that bakers and the building trades were prominent, with above average numbers supporting the Independent platform, although dyers, woolcombers and twisterers were also slightly more likely to vote in this way.

It is notable that support for Beevor's anti-corporation platform was higher in St. Peter Mancroft, where the Tory interest had traditionally been strongest, and which possessed large numbers of

¹⁴⁴ G.A. Cranfield, The Development of the Provincial Newspaper (Oxford, 1962) pp.126-31; Alfred James Henderson, London and the National Government (Philadelphia, 1975) pp.124-5

¹⁴⁵ Marie Peters, Pitt and Popularity (Oxford, 1980), p.25

¹⁴⁶ Poll for Members of Parliament (Norwich, 1768)

resident middling tradesmen. Nicholas Rogers observed in relation to politics in the city of Westminster that opposition sentiments did not simply subside, to resurface again the 1760s, but remained a continuous feature.¹⁴⁷ Toryism continued as an important political language throughout our period, as evinced by the fact its rhetoric and symbolism both informed and structured the patriot appeal of the Wilkite radicals of the 1760s.¹⁴⁸

In this context the appeals to the paternalism of the moral economy should perhaps be qualified as a rhetorical resource. The invocation of paternalist principles of the moral economy primarily served as a communal defence of particular standards of governance, in support of customary principles. However the Independent critics of the established corporation interest also found in it the instrumental means to support a far more broadly defined sense of the public interest. Although the corporation's commitment to paternalist intervention in economic affairs was in general reactive, and employed intermittently in response to necessity, the rhetorical claims and expectations were far more consistently defined. In spite of efforts to reform the efficacy of populist appeals to the legitimacy and authority of custom and paternalist governance, it continued to retain much of its persuasiveness, although already largely at odds with the system of economic marketing in place by the 1760s.

¹⁴⁷ Rogers, 'Aristocratic Clientage, Trade and Independency', p.105

¹⁴⁸ Linda Colley, 'Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism before Wilkes', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5:31 (1981)

CONCLUSION

In the course of the first seventy years of the eighteenth-century the government of Norwich was principally concerned with maintaining social order. The approach of the city's magistracy to the wide-ranging economic and political changes of the age was not however consistent, but rather represented the attempt to offset concerns about stability and order against the need for reform of its political and legal institutions and the weakening of custom in managing economic affairs. The declining importance of guild controls and of corporative approaches to marketing and the determination of labour relations can be seen as indicative of the progressive redrawing of the public jurisdiction, although this process was certainly not complete by the end of our period.

The magistrates' periodic concerns with the reformation of manners or measures against vagrancy persistently drew on traditional principles of parochialism and hierarchy, which if ill-suited to changing economic needs, provided an expedient means to regulate the local polity. Consequently governors' rhetoric was frequently insufficient to support the changes they were trying to effect. In the course of the 1752 dispute between journeymen and master woolcombers, in which the corporation threw its weight behind the larger merchant-manufacturers of the city, although it possessed the statutory power to proscribe the artisans' combinations, it proved unable or unwilling to implement the measures. In spite of the legal and political authority invested in the city's governors, a unilateral approach to implementing change was still largely impractical, and governance needed to be managed and negotiated.

If the state in the eighteenth-century was still carried out in a largely non-centralised, diffuse pattern of administration, there was in the period a definable sense of power and authority becoming more formalised and concentrated. By the time of the 1729 Election Act the Mayor's Court had in effect become far more honorific, concerned less with the day-to-day work of municipal administration or the execution of justice, with those duties largely confined to the Assembly, Sheriff's Court and Quarter Sessions for the city. By bringing the local organs of government into closer conformity with specialised and standardised definitions and formulae they assumed a legal regularity which better facilitated integration into a national system. Ultimately this process only reached consummation with the Reform Acts of the 1830s, but the case of Norwich shows a growing willingness from at least the 1720s to regulate its administrative and judicial institutions.

What this meant was that legal definitions and procedures reduced the scope for the informal jurisdiction of customary definitions. This can be seen in the changing boundaries of the law in distinctions between territories of interest demarcated as private and public, or as it could be conceptualised, as shifting from a patriarchal definition of society to one in which economy was separated from politics. The increasing formalisation of the offices and legal framework of the state was achieved at the expense of moving away from a more directly participatory sense of involvement. Forms of association, and the institutions they gave rise to were treated as extra-legal, having little formal authority. Legitimacy came, with the generation of new rationalised networks and criteria for its construction, to be equated with legality. State formation in the eighteenth-century is probably best understood as a gradual process of intensification, in which the boundaries between locality and nation were shifting to create a new type of state. The state

itself was nothing new, but alterations to its limits and roles needed to be naturalised, legitimating its jurisdictions.

In part, this shift occurred with the active encouragement of Parliament, which from the beginning of the eighteenth-century had incorporated measures to place industrial relations on a strictly legal footing, in an effort to avoid the kind of *ad hoc* expectations and settlements which were incorporated into the more informal workings of the customary system. However the tendency towards the concentration of power in more narrowly defined institutional channels was also a consequence of the spread of polite culture, and the standardisation provided by shared forms of emulation. Eighteenth-century standards of sociable conduct and intercourse offered a means for negotiating and integrating social change at the top of society, moving beyond factional differences to create an inclusive polite culture. But in doing so, they also consolidated socially oligarchical tendencies and promoted the social exclusion from the mass of dependent labouring poor, and denigrated the consensual authority of vernacular populism.

This tendency was already well developed at the beginning of the century, and demonstrated in the case of issues around knowledge creation highlighted by the publication of the antiquarian histories of Norwich. The intention of legislation to persuade more tradesmen from the textile industry to take the freedom of the city seems to have been primarily concerned with gaining men of sufficient wealth and rank who were qualified to occupy the senior representative offices within the corporation. In contrast to any sense of the corporation's role in the life of the city waning, there was a concerted effort to ensure that its offices were occupied by men of superior status.

However, such attempts were ultimately only partly successful, and as we've seen, by the end of our period the labouring poor of the

city still invoked the right to represent itself as, and act on behalf of, the public. When such actions were a matter of communal interest it continued to invoke the right to direct action to rectify it, as had been the case with the anti-Methodist rioting, and, more explicitly, the 1766 bread riots. In 1766 the crowd claimed legitimacy on the basis of not just the informal 'moral economy', but of the Edwardian statutes against engrossing, forestalling and regrating. The government was little better equipped to deal with the problem of dearth, and once it had allowed the prohibitions on exports to lapse it was left to rely on Tudor statutes ill-matched to the realities of eighteenth-century markets. Marketing and provisioning had become increasingly treated in a privatised fashion, dislocated out of the space of the public market into the inns. However any such shift was still partial at best, and in the face of civic disturbances and facing allegations of corporate negligence, the city's governors continued to appeal to interventionist, paternalist measures in response.

What can be seen in the period under examination is that these transformations were in the main only unevenly realised at this time. Consequently vestigially patriarchal appeals to custom or to the local community also continued to provide a discursive resource to which both governors and governed appealed in order to represent their respective interests. Although new economic and cultural developments unsettled established practices and ways of conducting political administration they did not dispel them; rather they overlapped with each other, their disjunctions veiled and moderated by a largely reactive, and frequently *ad hoc*, approach to government. Any separation of polite and popular forms of knowledge only complicated the process of integrating change into eighteenth-century society, and required a common source of appeal to legitimate and negotiate their reception.

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